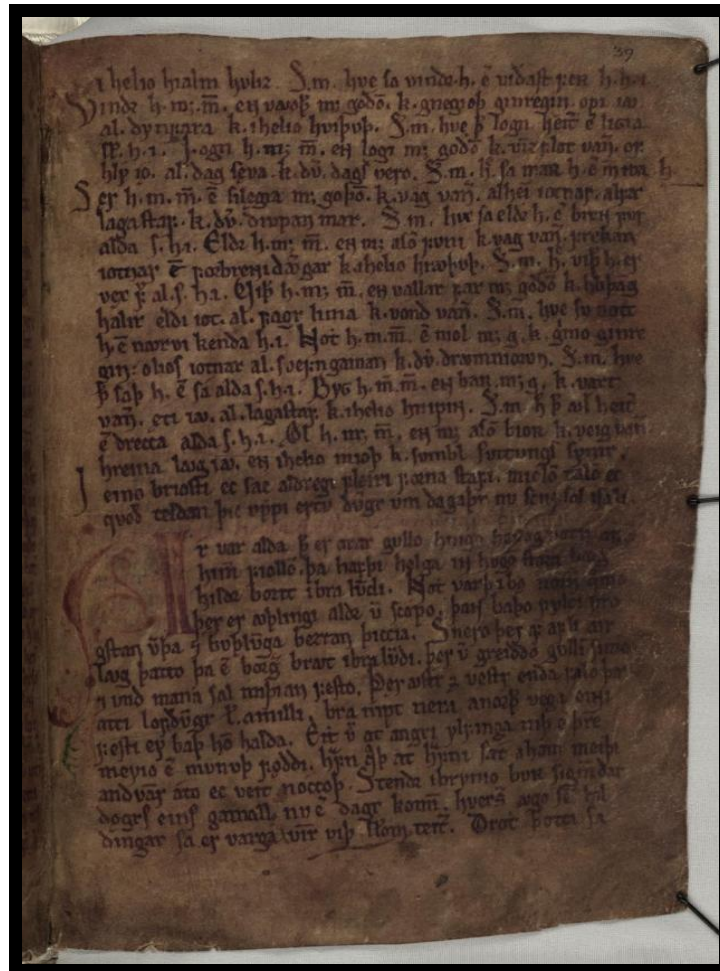


Orality, Literacy, and the making of 13th century Eddic Poetry



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Introduction

The Codex Regius of the Elder Edda (GKS 2365 4to), a medieval manuscript wrought with speculation, who created it and for what purpose? It has long been assumed that eddic poetry was oral poetry and yet this unique codex of mythological and heroic eddic poems seems to betray every arguable sign of literary workings. This thesis on orality, literacy, and the making of 13th century eddic poetry attempts to discuss the process by which oral poetry became literary poetry. It aims to 1) elucidate the debate on defining the terms with which to best analyse the sociolinguistic environment of medieval Scandinavia, 2) discuss eddic poetry as oral poetry, 3) explore the study of *grammatica* and the subsequent development of secular literature in Iceland, and finally 4) argue the Codex Regius (*R*) with regard to *Snorra Edda* and the tradition of vernacular grammatical handbooks.

I have opted to take the middle ground where possible believing this to be the best approach when analysing the special circumstance of medieval Scandinavia which cannot be said to be a purely oral or literate culture. It is perhaps more appropriately viewed as a hybrid culture of medieval oral traditions and grammatical learning. With the use of runic inscriptions and texts of Old Norse poetry, I try to find the balance between the oral and literate modes of communication and argue how the interest in skaldic verse making may have led to the creation of *R*.

In attempting to understand how and why *R* came into being, Guðrún Nordal's 2001 study *Tools of Literacy* has proved invaluable. She has developed a keen argument that justifies the use of vernacular poetry as part of a handbook tradition with regard to *Snorra Edda*. Taking her study one step further, I have applied her findings, coupled with Martin Irvine's 1996 study on *grammatica*, to analysis if *R* was designed as a complementary text to the Icelandic vernacular study of poetic grammar. Congruently, AM 748 4to I and II (A) has been used in chapter 4 to support the idea that eddic poetry might have been intrinsically linked to vernacular grammatical studies, namely the study of skaldic poetry, and hence representing the same vein as *Snorra Edda*.

While this thesis utilises several theories and methods of approach, the encompassing theory is in part basic communication theory and more so hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the underlying principle developed in chapter 1 whereby I argue that medieval orality and literacy should be understood in terms of its use and role in the medieval culture and, as much as possible, from the perspective of the individual(s) who created the material. Similarly, chapter 3 attempts to establish an understanding of the culture and social forces that may have influenced the view towards the production and use of heathen poetry in a Christian milieu. More specifically, this thesis is embedded in the idea that the understanding of the sources used must be found within its cultural, historical, and literary context. Chapters 2 and 3 adhere to the principle that the understanding of the textual evidence as a whole is established by reference to its individual parts: the oral tradition and grammatical tradition. In turn, the understanding of both these traditions is established by reference to the texts.

The major task in the study of eddic poetry as oral poetry would seem to be the analysis of the poetic grammar and the genre. Principally, this means its use of language and a coming to terms with the concept of formula. As an interdisciplinary study, this thesis seeks to understand Old Norse oral traditions and the implication of literacy to eddic poetry by relying on anthropological studies of modern oral cultures, literary studies, as well as studies in modes of communication, linguistics and runology.

When the anthropologists Milman Parry completed his study of Slavic oral poets, he discovered when recording the same song twice from the same singer that exact correspondences between two performances were rare. Individual lines and episodes were composed differently in the two versions, but they both used the same formulas. His *oral-formulaic theory*, which suggests that oral poetry is improvised rather than strictly memorised, has provided much debate about whether this theory is applicable to the study of Old Norse poetry. Scholars have questioned if evidence of an oral tradition from a different culture and time period is a suitable measure for proposing theories of Old Norse orality. Parry's oral theory remains in scholarly interest because it nonetheless provides a model or basis for analysis. It tends to explain repeated features as products of a common style, either filtered by a common poetic grammar or selected from a common

store. The surviving poetic corpus thus becomes a product of a single generative device: the tradition.

Similarly, with regard to source criticism, scholars have proposed that the poems in *R* have been copied and compiled from other collection, and thus can not be seen as having derived directly from scribal recordings of an oral performance. It is therefore questionable if anything can be said about oral poetry or the tradition by use of a text several centuries remove and produced under a literary Christianised culture.

Given that the Church controlled the training of writing and the book tradition, what purpose could the interest and increase in vernacular literature and the old pagan traditions serve in a Christian society? In other words, why would men brought up in the tradition of medieval scholastic training engage in the writing and recording of 'heathen' tales? Perhaps one argument is that the eddic/oral tradition had long been a form of entertainment, a display of keen wit and mastery of language (as displayed on the Rök Stone, and in the various *sennur* preserved in *R*). It could be argued that this display ignited the interest in copying and preserving such material as found in *R*.

It has, however, been assumed from the 1960's by Robert Kellogg, reaffirmed in the 1980's, and at the turn of this century that *R* was written in the same traditions as *Snorra Edda* which could mean that, like Snorri's work, the compilation of the poems was likely formed to serve as a study aid for primarily poetic language and forms. This hypothesis is of course tentative, but I aim to support this argument in the course of this thesis. Therefore, the central question of this thesis asks why a 13th century, ecclesiastically trained member of the clergy was interested in undertaking the arduous task of compiling and preserving verse rooted in pagan oral culture? And how did the Church reconcile the use of such material?

Chapter 1

Understanding Old Norse Oral Culture

*“There is to date no study of oral culture in the medieval West even though most people are aware that an oral culture predominated in the Middle Ages. Presumably the attitude of Gregory the Great—that because of the transitory nature of the spoken word the oral tradition simply cannot be studied—is shared by modern scholars of the Middle Ages.”*¹

Michael Richter, 1994.

Thirteen years after Richter wrote the above statement there remains a persistent problem facing studies of the medieval West, insufficient attention paid to its oral culture.

Although the tides in the study of Old Norse oral culture have been changing with the help of anthropological studies of modern oral cultures,² there remains a lack in generating fresh research. Granted it could be argued, and has been argued, that our knowledge of Old Norse orality is restricted by the material presented in the texts composed by authors or compilers belonging to an elite and/or ecclesiastical class. In addition, it can seem rather fruitless to try to build a profile of an oral culture from the perspective of texts several centuries removed and produced by individuals trained in the Latin grammatical tradition. More specifically, as the Russian historian Aaron Ja. Gurevich argues, the oral tradition of a distant past can not be directly recorded, because everything gained from the sources is only an indirect reflection, inevitably transformed, distorted, and filtered through ecclesiastical ideology.³ While I agree that the sources and texts give us a distorted image of the past oral culture, this argument seem to neglect the fact that all matter of artefacts, texts, recording or filming of cultures past and present are subject to the “filter(s)” and partiality of the person(s) who created the material we attempt to study. Not to mention that we as scholars or analysers interpret material evidence from our preconceived and learned point of view, cultural knowledge, and religious understanding. The materials we study, whether past or present will always be limited by the understanding of both the one(s) who produced the material and the one(s)

¹ Richter 1994: 82.

² These ‘modern oral cultures’ are to be understood as cultures that have survived, functioned, and maintained records of their history and genealogies among other things without the use of or reliance on written records or books.

³ Gurevich 1984: 51.

who are studying it. Thus, any conclusions should be tempered by an understanding of the premises from which we operate, and acknowledge that the material or in this case texts have been “transformed, distorted and filtered”.

The 13th century, or by the time the *R* was produced, cannot be said to operate as a purely oral or literate culture, but a culture in transition, a culture that utilised written records as well as trained rememberancers. Bear in mind that the ‘gift’ of literacy—the ability to both read and write the Latin script and later the vernacular—was a privilege offered to a select few, mainly the clerics and elite class. With the majority of the population having either little-to-no formal knowledge of reading or writing, and likely no access to manuscripts, the communication mode of choice remained through the spoken or sung word. Two common ways of delivering messages, laws, sermons, tales and so forth could either be via someone reading from a text or by trained rememberancers as had existed from before the introduction of Christianity and subsequently the Latin script culture.

Another key problem facing the study of the medieval West is the traditional definition of literacy and illiteracy, which has proven to be too narrow and unable to take into consideration regional areas such as Scandinavia where the situation was not a simple matter of whether one was literate in the traditional sense (could read and write Latin) or illiterate. To define literacy and illiteracy in this way is to exclude literacy in the vernacular⁴ or runic script, it is to incorrectly imply that the skill of reading and writing were inseparable, and that those who could neither read nor write Latin had no part in creating texts. Aware of the limitations of the traditional definition, scholars within the last few decades have attempted to solve this dilemma by broadening the term to fit the specific culture or cultures under investigation. Although studies of the medieval West have been steadily redefining over the last 30 years, there remains much to be desired both in our understanding of orality in the middle ages and in more specific regions such as Scandinavia.

The primary questions this chapter attempts to investigate are as follows: What is the oral culture and tradition? How does it function? And, can anything really be said

⁴ For the purpose of this study, ‘the vernacular’ refers to either Old Norse and/or Old Icelandic.

about Old Norse oral tradition, which is thought to have been the roots of the tales found in *R* among other works?

What is Orality?

Orality, at best, is often defined by scholars as the negation of literacy, yet our understanding of what literacy is and is not have changed over the centuries—and continues to be altered—from the ability to read and write the Latin script (implying an understanding of the language) to the ability to read and write any script including the vernacular such as the runic script in the case of Scandinavia.⁵ However, this definition of orality by virtue demands an in depth knowledge of literacy, which in many ways creates a rather unsatisfactory picture of orality because orality, as Joseph Harris writes, “exists before and outside of writing.”⁶ Thus, given that orality is wholly separate from literacy, is it misleading to employ such terms as ‘oral literature’ or ‘oral texts’? As noted by Robert Kellogg, “in the strict etymological sense of the word, literature does not occur without writing. It is by definition the art of letters.”⁷ It is perhaps more feasible to use a term such as orally inspired literature, meaning literature like the poems in *R* or the Homeric epics in which the contents are thought to have come from an oral tradition either by means of a singer or orator dictating to a scribe, or from the memory of the one(s) writing.

Perhaps a more detailed analogy of the problem with defining orality as the negation of literacy can be summed up in the words of Walter Ong as “rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels.”⁸ He goes on to explain the comparison by writing:

Imagine writing a treatise on horses (for people who have never seen a horse) which starts with the concept not of horses but of ‘automobile’, built on the readers direct experience of automobiles. It proceeds to discourse on horses by always referring to them as ‘wheelless automobiles’, explaining to highly

⁵ During the Middle Ages, reading and writing were often separate tasks seen as a type of labour. A craftsman could both read and copy the symbols he saw without exhibiting actual knowledge of what he was reading. For further study of literacy and the different levels of literacy refer to Aslak Leistøl, Terje Spurkland and Michael Clanchy.

⁶ Harris 1985: 112

⁷ Scholes and Kellogg 1966: 17.

⁸ Ong 2002: 12.

automobilised readers...all the points of differences...in the end, horses are only what they are not.”⁹

Although early stages of literacy likely depended heavily on orality, its alleged formulas, and the oral culture, orality never needed the use of literacy to function and be transmitted. Of course, once a system of transferring words from spoken to visual form is introduced, orality ceases to be orality in a pure state and we eventually have a ‘secondary orality’, or oral performances dependent on a script.¹⁰ The introduction of a script culture inevitably changes the oral mentality—whereby one’s notion of truth and past is based on present conditions—to a sense of truth based on historical, dated records and the compilation of information. This shift in mentality naturally did not happen overnight, but it did change certain preoccupation with chronology especially in texts. As reflected in present day research, ‘accurate’ dating of objects or texts seem to be of paramount importance for establishing a sense of truth and ‘originality’ among other things. Orality in this thesis can be defined as the communal knowledge and transference of information that existed without the reliance of written records and accessible to all social classes. It informs the social, religious, legal and overall cultural infrastructure by employing mnemonic tools such as formulaic language, characters and content. Trained rememberers function as official keepers of the ‘tribal encyclopaedia’, and requires and audience of ‘hearers and seers.’

Some Problems with Studying Medieval Oral Culture

It is problematical for anyone whose skills are shaped by literacy, especially when dependence on the written word is paramount as in today’s culture, to not be prejudice in favour of literacy. One tends to overlook the fact that medieval literacy can be liken to an infant learning to establish itself compared to the well developed ancient art of orality. Additionally, the transitory nature of the spoken word further complicates studies of medieval oral cultures whereby the main evidence is through texts. Although these texts may display oral qualities such as formulaic language and motifs, written words cannot

⁹ Ong 2002: 12.

¹⁰ Refer to Ong 2002, for a study of the different types of orality.

reproduce the oral tradition as a whole, nor its cultural context. It is this paradigm that begs the question, how oral is orally inspired literature?

In 1983, Brian Stock argued that, “medieval documentation provides little direct evidence for pure orality, although one catches glimpses of it in accounts of gestures, rituals, and feudal ceremonies.”¹¹ Eleven years later, Michael Richter (1994) approached the problem of orality in texts by maintaining that there are two key problems facing the study of oral cultures: 1) the obstacle of the Latin language, which Richter contends “is an unsuitable medium for reporting the oral tradition cultivated in another language”, and 2) “there is the obstacle of the fact that the oral culture was essentially something unremarkable to contemporaries.”¹² Despite the seemingly colossal challenges, both Stock and Richter reason the possibility that something can and should be said about the oral culture. In part, it is a matter of redefining or broadening the focus as both scholars have done in their respective works. For the purpose of my current study of orality and literacy in medieval Scandinavia the focus could thus be expanded to not just studying traditional texts but also non-traditional texts such as runic inscriptions to gain a more comprehensive insight of Old Norse oral culture.

In the case of medieval Scandinavia we cannot talk about a “primary oral culture”¹³ due to the evidence of runic inscriptions with some of the oldest dated to approximately the 5th century A.D exemplified by the Karlevi stone. Although it cannot be said how widespread the use of runic texts were, and how many could actually read the inscriptions, the existence and use of a textual language suggests that the oral culture during this period must be understood in terms of its co-existence with a literate mentality. A literate mentality is one in which the act of keeping written records changes the nature of communication by allowing for more objectivity. Interestingly, because pre-Christian runic inscriptions seem to merely supplement the oral culture rather than replace or dominate it, further study into the inscribed contents and linguistics might reveal nearer oral influences.

It should be noted that research done in the last 30 years or so has witnessed a strong change in attitude towards the subject of orality and literacy. Scholars such as

¹¹ Stock 1983: 8.

¹² Richter 1994: 102.

¹³ A primary oral culture entails oral cultures untouched by writing. Ong 2002:31.

Brian Stock, D.H. Green, Michael Clanchy, and Michael Richter have been vital proponents in realizing the interplay between the two modes of communication rather than the more one-sided approach of previous scholars that seem to be prejudice in favour of literacy.¹⁴ Other scholars studying the oral and literate mentality of more modern day cultures, such as Jack Goody, Ian Watt, and Walter Ong, have also been instrumental in altering our understanding of oral and literate modes of communicating, and as a consequence have inspired renewed research into the medieval cultures.

How might an oral culture function?

One approach to understanding the oral culture is to maintain, as Richter suggests, that the oral tradition should be thought of in terms of performance. This view acknowledges a dynamic relationship between performers and appreciative audience, sound and silences, music and gestures.¹⁵ In essence, oral traditions involve a sensory experience which texts cannot explicitly produce. The oral experience thus represented a form of entertainment and education that was common property unlike manuscripts that belonged to namely the clergy and some aristocrats.

One example that hints at this notion of oral traditions being common property can be seen in the preserved eddic and skaldic material where a certain knowledge is assumed of its audience and often references to other stories and myths are made. Take for example this verse from *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana* I. where Guðmundr and Sinfiotli (Helgi's half brother) are hurling insults at one another. Guðmundr retorts with:

‘Fát mantu, fylkir,	fornra spialla,
er þú odlingom	ósonno bregðr;
þú hefir etnar	úlfa krásir
oc broeðr þínom	at bana orðit,
opt sár sogin	með svolom munni,
hefr í hreysi	hvarleidr scridit.’ ¹⁶

¹⁴ Clanchy 1993: 7-11.

¹⁵ Richter 1994: 90.

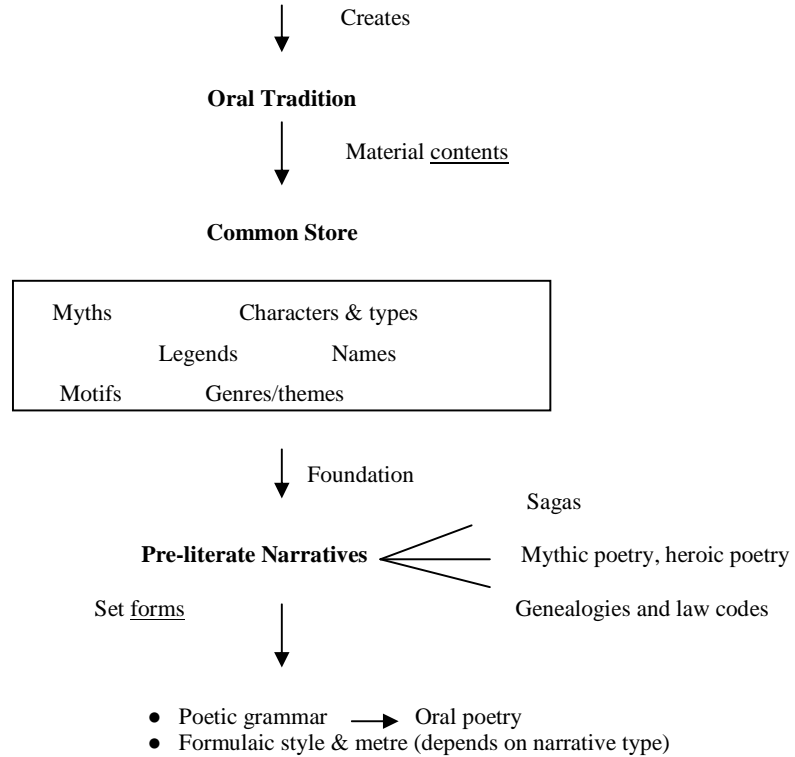
¹⁶ ‘Little must you recall, lord, the old stories,/ when you taunt the princes with untruths;/ you have eaten the leavings of wolves/ and been the slayer of your brother,/ often you’ve sucked wounds with a cold snout;/ hated everywhere, you’ve crept onto a stone-tip’ (transl. Larrington, HH, V36).

Here Guðmundr is referring to a tale documented in the *Völsunga Saga* where Sigmundr and Sinfiötli are transformed into wolves. Had it not been for the textual evidence recorded in the *Völsunga Saga* scholars would likely have been missed this reference. Simply put, one could think of the oral tradition as functioning within the guidelines of commonly known formulas and formulaic language. These formulas, be it in the form of language motifs, stock characters, themes and so forth, could be thought of as deriving from a common store. This store, in essence, contains the fundamental narratives that organise and explains various societal infrastructures as well as the natural and spiritual world. It provides the basis from which individuals are able to orientate themselves, and partake in the communal entertainment of story telling and listening. Or as Margaret Clunies Ross puts it, “these narratives belong to the shared cultural knowledge of a particular group which every member of the society internalises.”¹⁷

The diagram illustrates in brief how the oral tradition could be conceptualised. To begin with, the society or culture essentially produces a tradition of telling tales and deciding what the material content of these tales should be, how they best exemplify the tribal encyclopaedia, and explain phenomena such as the shifts in weather or their origins. To categorise the material contents and systematise the formula of telling each kind of tale such as a fertility tale, an origin tale or a warrior’s tale and so forth, a common store must be created. This theoretical common store would provide the rules and formulas of the style and diction used of each type of tale. This common store, in turn, provides the foundation for all pre-literate narratives for skaldic and eddic poetry, sagas, genealogies, and perhaps even law codes. These oral narratives would thus have a fixed form and poetic grammar, while the formulaic style and metre would depend on the narrative type such as skaldic (*dróttkvætt* ‘court metre’) or eddic song (*ljóðahátt* ‘old song metre’) or poetic story (*fornyrðislag* ‘old story metre’).

¹⁷ Clunies Ross 2005:25

Oral Society/Culture



Note that it is essentially the form or metre that differentiates the narrative type even though the contents may be similar. This simplified diagram serves to illustrate my understanding of how the oral culture might operate and produce narratives. It is by no means the opinion of other scholar, but by this theory, it should be understood that I tend to lean more on the idea that Old Norse oral poetry was memorised as opposed to improvised, suggesting that I agree with Harris' view over Parry and Lord's study of Yugoslavian oral poets. I maintain this view based on the idea that Old Norse metres such as the *fornyrðislag* metre appears to be structural rather than ornamental. Furthermore, a comparison of the two versions of *Völuspá* found in *R* and *A* would perhaps support the idea that the metre is structural. I am of the opinion that the differences in the texts have to do with literary corruptions as oppose to a corruption of the oral tradition as it seems more likely that early recordings and copying would have a higher error rate than trained rememberencers.

In 1990, after having analysed the state of research in medieval studies, D.H. Green argued that:

Any society with a sense of self-awareness has to store essential information about its past, and in an oral society this has to be done by memory rather than by writing, by professional rememberancers rather than trained scribes. In light of this need the poet in an oral society must be seen, not primarily as an entertainer or as a creative artist, but rather as one who possesses the skill of making language memorable and can thus fulfil the task of mnemonic preservation of what his society needs to retain of its past, of acting as what Havelock has called “a tribal encyclopaedia,” helping his society preserve its group consciousness.¹⁸

The scribe, not wholly unlike the oral poet, has a similar task of making language memorable for the text’s audience. Additionally, it can be argued that the performance aspects, melody and rhythm of language, the use of alliterations, assonance, repetition of motifs, and the essence of contents within a text should be critically analysed as being in part catered towards the oral pallet or perhaps even postulate the existence of a living oral tradition.

Trying to understand how medieval oral cultures might function is an arduous task that often obliges scholars to turn to studies of historical oral culture for help. While these various studies of orality among African tribes or studies such as the famed study of Yugoslavians bards by Parry and Lord are invaluable, caution should be taken in noting that different cultures from different time periods likely have different ways of recreating their verbal art. In other words, one oral tradition will not be exactly the same as another but perhaps share similarities which will be useful in building a profile of Old Norse orality. For example, in his study entitled *The Singer of Tales*, Lord finds that Yugoslavian “bards never repeat a song exactly.”¹⁹ The bard will also employ a kind of improvisation technique creating new formulas based on the old ones, substituting new words in place of old ones so long as they fit the metrical pattern. This way of creating new formulas could have been used in the Old Norse oral tradition, but more and more scholars such as Lars Lönnroth and Harris argue in favour of the verbal material being memorised more than improvised.

¹⁸ Green 1990: 212-3.

¹⁹ Lord 1971: 125.

When comparing textual material from the two versions of the *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana* (HH, HHII) poems in the *R* where the tales are essentially the same but not word for word, it is at times tempting to conceive that the former Parry/Lord *oral-formulaic theory* fits into the Old Norse tradition. One example is from the beginning of the *senna* in HH and HHII.²⁰ It seems that the similarity between the verses initially caused the compiler, in the process of copying the text from an alternate source, to assume the two *sennur* were the same and thus excluded the *senna* in HHII until he realised that they were in fact different and abruptly wrote in the second *senna*. Could the two versions exemplify an improvisational technique as proposed by the *oral-formulaic theory*? Or perhaps this alteration could be due in part to the faulty memory of the one responsible for recording the tales and thus a corruption of the text from which the compiler is working from rather than any fault of the oral tradition or those employed to remember and reproduce the tales. Despite the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between recorded modern oral cultures and Old Norse oral cultures, the existence of these modern studies nonetheless provide scholars with a basis of comparison and hypothetical situations in which to work.

Modern Oral Cultures and Old Norse Orality

As previously touched upon, studies of modern oral cultures have indeed been instrumental in altering research on the subject of medieval orality and literacy. In spite of regional differences, these studies have expanded our understanding of how oral cultures function, and how the introduction of writing altered the oral mentality. In his work with Ian Watt, Jack Goody mentions that permanent written records in effect changes our perceptions from an a-historic existence to awareness of the “pastness of the past” allowing for a more objective attitude towards information and cultural history. Goody would also argue that there is a level of consistency or accuracy to be found in written records as opposed to oral traditions by virtue of the concrete nature of writing. Furthermore, literate societies eliminate the need for what J.A. Barnes terms as ‘structural

²⁰ This example is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

amnesia',²¹ because written records alleviate the burden of storing much of the collective memory of the past and present. As a consequence, literate societies are faced with fixed accounts of the past which are unable to assimilate, be discarded, or altered—in the same way as the oral tradition—to better explain or fit with present changes.

Evidence of 'structural amnesia' and how it works in an oral society is best portrayed in Goody's study of the Gonja in Ghana. Written records by the British at the turn of the 20th century show that Ndewura Jakpa, the founding father of the state of Gonja, had seven sons. The number of sons corresponded to the number of rulers in the seven territorial divisions. By the time the myth of the state was rerecorded some 60 years later two of the seven divisions had disappeared, one was deliberately incorporated into a neighbouring division and the other became affected by boundary changes. In these later recording of the myth, Jakpa is said only to have had five sons. No mention was made of the British or their affects on two missing groups.²² 'Structural amnesia' involves omitting aspect of the cultural history or genealogy, which is no longer deemed necessary in light of present circumstances. Furthermore, the Gonja example emphasises that genealogies, much in the same way as myths, act as 'charters' of present social circumstances rather than as faithful historical records of the past. The example of the Gonja tribe alludes to a telltale trait of orality whereby the lack of consideration of a linear time, or preoccupation with chronology is evident. Time seems to be more symbolic or relative.

The eddic poems in *R* have arguably picked up on this oral trait as seen in accounts of heroes' births, to battles, to death all seeming to take place at an unspecified point in time. The sequence of events in *R* is often arbitrary and yet we are to understand it to have happened once upon a fixed time. Thus evidence of 'structural amnesia' has likely been prevalent in Old Norse society as seen in the creation of genealogies that only mention the relevant individuals.

Goody and many others show through their examples of modern oral cultures that there seems to be a general pattern of behaviour which can be used to paint a picture of

²¹ Goody 1975: 57

²² Goody 1975: 33.

past orality with some accuracy. Richter, in his study of “Approaches to Medieval Oral Culture” highlights that:

What the barbarians of the early medieval centuries have in common with the people studied by the anthropologists in our century is social viability, an internal balance, as well as a non-literate culture. These are characteristics of central importance, for these reasons the concern with the modern anthropological studies can enrich us in our approach of the early medieval barbarians in helping to formulate the appropriate questions to be asked of them.²³

Similarly, we need look no further than Ong for support for using modern oral cultures as a backdrop for composing theoretical maxims to understanding the past. Ong cautions however that, “what an oral formula is and how it works depends on the tradition in which it is used, but that there is ample common ground in all traditions to make the concept valid.”²⁴ Moreover it is vital when constructing a general theory of orality to establish and understand it as much as possible within its social context.

Literacy and Illiteracy

Studies of oral cultures of the medieval West have suffered somewhat from limitations of rather narrow definitions of literacy and illiteracy. Before Stock and Richter, Jack Goody, studying *Literacy in Traditional Societies* in 1975 asked, “at what point in the formalization of pictographs or other graphic signs can we talk of ‘letters’, of literacy? And what proportion of the society has to write and read before the culture as a whole can be described as literate?”²⁵ Such questions are representative of some of the problems scholars have faced in trying to define literacy and applying the definition to their individual studies.

Traditional ideas of ‘medieval literacy’ suggest that, “*litteratus* implied a certain degree of knowledge of the Latin language and script. A person who did not know how to read and write Latin was *illiteratus*, even if they were proficient in reading and writing in the vernacular.”²⁶ By this definition, the Vikings can be said to be illiterate, however, this view of literacy comes across as too narrow and one-sided in light of the literacy (a

²³ Richter 1994: 98.

²⁴ Ong 2002: 25.

²⁵ Goody 1975: 27.

²⁶ Spurkland 2004: 340.

literacy in the vernacular) existing in what would otherwise be classed as an illiterate culture. As I have tried to show with the example of the pre-Christian Norse culture, an oral culture does not necessarily imply an illiterate or script-less culture. Furthermore, a person can be literate without the overt use of texts, and one can use texts without evidencing genuine literacy.²⁷ Examples of textuality can be seen by the employment of illiterate scribes or runographers to copy texts. They could neither read nor write, or if they could it was imperfectly, their job was to simply copy the ‘signs’ they saw before them.²⁸

It could be argued that pre-Viking Age inscriptions—with their lack of punctuations, alternate reading directions, and discrepancies in spelling—are telltale signs of the oral mental landscape. In recent years scholars such as Terje Spurkland has argued that the rune stones were designed to be read in silence and texts out loud.²⁹ This theory presents a challenge to the understanding of oral culture in general because orality is often associated with illiteracy. If Spurkland’s theory is correct our notion of medieval Scandinavian oral culture must surely be revised.

Aware of these limitations, scholars today are more inclined to expand the definition of literacy to encompass any ability to read and write any language because they recognise as Jan Meijer, Aslak Leistøl and others do that the medieval period is not a simply matter of strict *litteratus* or *illiteratus*.³⁰ By now it should be easier to see that orality and literacy during this period were interdependent probably mutually influencing one another, and yet remained as independent modes of communication. In short, although there are obstacles in studying the oral culture, by redefining the tools traditionally used to study both oral and literate cultures we will perhaps be able to produce more satisfactory studies of the period.

²⁷ Stock 1983: 7.

²⁸ Meijer 1997: 94-5.

²⁹ Spurkland 2004: 342.

³⁰ Meijer, Jan. 1997

The Implications of Literacy

To fully understand the oral culture and its traditions we must perhaps first try to understand not the consequence but the implications of literacy. The study of the medieval period cannot be seen as complete without taking into account the technological changes (namely the introduction of a script culture whether vernacular or Latin) that affected not just the social structure, but also the subsequent acceptance and segregation within social groups. These changes, although gradual, altered everything from politics and cultural heritage to the way people communicated and stored information. In short, the distinction between oral and literate cultures has significant validity especially in the Middle Ages because one cannot appreciate the texts from that period without taking into account the influences of oral traditions and influences outside of those traditions.

To sum up some of the attitudes and developments of recent research it should be understood, as Stock points out that, “to investigate medieval literacy is accordingly to inquire into the uses of texts, not only into the allegedly oral or written elements in the works themselves, but, more importantly, to inquire into the audiences for which they were intended and the mentality in which they were received.”³¹ Correspondingly, in 2002, Walter Ong stressed that, “writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhance it, making it possible to organise the ‘principles’ or constituents of oratory into a scientific ‘art’, a sequentially ordered body of explanation that showed how and why oratory achieved and could be made to achieve its various specific effects.”³² In order to advance in the study of medieval orality, it is imperative to be fully aware of the implications of literacy, how it functioned in the oral culture, and under what climate it was received.

Writing, as Clanchy has argued, should not be judged as a measure of progress or a necessary mark of civilisation because literacy has different effects according to circumstances and is not a civilising force in itself.³³ Identifying oral tradition as having been an important and viable method of storing culture, Richter, in the following year, set the stage for viewing oral cultures not as barbarians void of ‘higher thinking’ but as

³¹ Stock 1983: 7.

³² Ong 2002: 9.

³³ Clanchy 1993: 7

exemplars of a different kind of civilisation.³⁴ The oral civilisation is one in which concern is with place, myths, genealogies, and orientation in the present as opposed to literate civilisations which are more concerned with time and distance or the past. A factor of particular interest is how the meeting of two titan and seemingly opposite ideas of communicating were able to coexist in the middle ages?

The Literate Mentality

It can be said that the literate mentality of the medieval man was one of ambivalence. On the one hand written records were increasingly used to legitimise various rights to property, or claims to power,³⁵ and on the other hand, texts were seen more as symbolic evidence or witnesses rather than fact.³⁶ To better illustrate the literate mentality of the Middle Ages, it is useful to compare continental views with that of Norse views.

Thanks to Clanchy's invaluable studies on the literate mentality in medieval England, we can better understand how reading and writing were looked upon as a kind of labour or profession. Writing was considered a special skill, but the technical knowledge and comprehension of what was written often required rather advanced and extensive learning. Writing had the profoundest effects on the nature of proof, as it is arguably more durable and concrete than the spoken word. On the other hand, those who valued the traditional wisdom of rememberers within their communities had reason to distrust it.³⁷

In his book, *The Implications of Literacy*, Stock focuses on the 'rebirth' of literacy and the effects it had on the cultural life of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Unlike previous scholars, he is not concerned with establishing literacy's connections with economic development or arguing the number of readers and writers.³⁸ Rather, he is concerned with studying the effects of literacy by analysis through three key approaches. It is Stock's first approach that best shows the trend of newer research interested in the

³⁴ Richter 1994: 81-104.

³⁵ Sigurdsson 2004.

³⁶ Clanchy 1993: 253-318.

³⁷ Clanchy 1993: 186.

³⁸ Stock 1983: 5.

symbiosis of orality and literacy. Stock attempts to replace a linear, evolutionary thinking which describes phases of an integrated cultural transformation happening at the same time which allows him to handle orality and literacy not as two separate devices but coexisting and mutually influencing one another. This relationship between orality and literacy is evident throughout many manuscripts from the period as will be discussed throughout the subsequent chapters. Clanchy exemplifies this relationship further by pointing out that, medieval writing was mediated to the non-literate by the persistence of the habit of reading aloud and by the preference, even among the educated, for listening to a statement rather than scrutinising it in script.³⁹

Contrasts in mentalities towards literacy are exemplified by the attitudes held by various leaders of the age. In the words of Henry I (1068-1135): king of England, “rex illiterates, asinus coronatus.”⁴⁰ Or as Alfred the Great (849-901) King of West Saxons argues, “therefore it seems better to me...for us also to translate some books which are most needful for men to know into the language which we can all understand; and...that all the youth now in England of free men, who are rich enough to be able to devote themselves to it, be set to learn as long as they are not fit for any other occupation, until they are able to read English writing well.”⁴¹ It is evident from these two quotes that a degree of importance was placed on being literate at least for the upper class. However, interestingly, in Alfred’s view, the importance is mainly placed on being able to read not write, and only if one is not fit for any other occupation.

Compare these quotes with traditional descriptions of Scandinavian nobility and heroes in the sagas or poems whereby the importance is placed on their accomplishments, skills in sports and warfare, eloquence of speech and physical appearance, not their penmanship or ability to read and write.⁴² Perhaps it is simply taken for granted that being literate was part and parcel of the privileges afforded to the upper class, but then again so was being skilled in warfare. One could infer from the two quotes and the information or lack there of in both Old Norse texts and other medieval literature that being literate was mainly important for selected men, but played a secondary role to more

³⁹ Clanchy 1993: 186.

⁴⁰ “An illiterate king is a crowned ass.” A proverb said by the contemporary chronicler William of Malmesbury and to have been used by Henry in his youth.

⁴¹ Preface to the translation of Pope Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis*, 894 A.D.

⁴² Refer to *Heimskringla* and *Rigspula*.

noble occupations such as knighthood. Keeping in mind issues of source criticism, it seems that something substantial could nonetheless be said about Scandinavian oral culture through closer analysis of the available texts.

Scandinavia and the debate of Orality and Literacy

Changes of scholarly interests and views of medieval orality and literacy have consequently sparked revised interests in the field of Scandinavian vernacular literacy. Increasing interest in runic literacy was especially fuelled after the substantial find of runic material in Bergen, Norway.⁴³ Medieval Scandinavia with its fair share of complexities with regards to the roughly 900 years of runic knowledge and usage before the introduction of the Latin script, presents a unique opportunity for the study of orality and literacy. Although oral communication dominates illiterate cultures, the known use of the runic script in the otherwise oral landscape of Northern Europe causes us to rethink what can be termed as literate. It could be questioned whether the evidence of the runic script should taint our perception of the level of orality in Scandinavia before the introduction of the Latin script. One could argue that the evidence of rune stones indicates a desire for a sense of permanency in spite of alleged faith in the oral traditions. Rune stones could, in part, be evidence of an ancient awareness of the ephemeral nature of orality—evidence of perhaps attempts to freeze-frame a moment in time. The use of inscriptions could have been the result of a fashion learned from encounters with literate civilizations such as the Latin tradition,⁴⁴ or they could have served as a complementing feature to oral traditions, simply another way of remembering. Ong says of the nature of sound, “it is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent...there is no way to stop sound and have sound...there is no equivalent of a still shot for sound”.⁴⁵ What can perhaps be seen in the evidence of grave mounds and rune-stone alike is a need to make a statement that has some sense of permanence.

⁴³ Spurkland, 2004: “Literacy and ‘Runacy’ in Medieval Scandinavia”

⁴⁴ Theories of the runic script’s origin points to a Latin based influence, which implies that there may have been learned habits of recording that came with it, calling into question the ‘orality’ of runic inscriptions in general.

⁴⁵ Ong 2002: 32.

Congruently, what could be witnessed are seeds of change—a growing need for a sense of greater stability, which the evanescence of sound cannot create.

One more obvious challenge facing studies of the Norse medieval culture resides in the awareness that the Latin script and learned literary traditions likely had an impact upon the vernacular language and oral-formulaic expressions. Furthermore, there is the added challenge with the written sources, which must be studied in context. The complexities facing orality and runic inscriptions in Scandinavia can only be resolved in light of further analysis of the region's textual evidence, a broader definition of literacy, and consideration of more recent studies of the implication and reception of literacy, and oral cultures. Or put another way, there is no way of advancing in research without adhering to the issues and solutions raised by scholarly debate of the last 30 years.

The multifarious research of present scholars on the topic of orality and literacy in general are as wide ranging as the facets of evidence provided by the material cultures from antiquity to modern times. Despite the extensive research done on orality and literacy, there remains much to be desired such as more in depth study of the oral and literate culture of medieval Scandinavia. One way to provide new solutions to old problems may lie in using the analytical tools given by present day scholars and apply them to the specific culture in question. Picking up on the unique nature of literacy in the medieval period, scholars have come to be more aware that the Middle Ages differed from the other periods in the complexity of its attitudes towards texts. Many modern scholars conclude as Green does that essentially we lack a definition of literacy that can encompass the peculiarities of the Middle Ages.⁴⁶ These peculiarities include literacy in the vernacular as well as expressional influences from oral traditions rooted in the texts. Despite the fact that Richter urged scholars a decade ago that more work was needed in the field of medieval orality, the time remains ripe for turning the attention to the 'barbarian' nations—using the extent of a variety of academic fields and studies of modern oral cultures affording us a more interdisciplinary and consequently a broader and more suitable approach. Through analyses of traditional and non-traditional material evidence we are likely to catch only whispers of the oral culture, but perhaps in the

⁴⁶ Green 1990:274-80.

process of looking for these traces we will be able to raise new questions to further the debate and refresh interest in the study of medieval orality and literacy.

Chapter 2

Eddic Poetry and the Oral Tradition

In a sense eddic scholars have always “known” that eddic poetry was oral poetry, but that knowledge was mostly an unspoken assumption based on the age of the verse and the introduction of writing to the north. This is still our basic assumption: eddic poetry flourished in a milieu in which writing did not play a major role in the conception, creation, performance, preservation, and transmission of poetry.

Joseph Harris 1985⁴⁷

Traces of eddic and skaldic poetry on remnant rune stones dating from before the 11th century, that is to say, before the formal introduction of the Latin alphabet and the book culture to Scandinavia, enables scholars to entertain the belief that these early stages of literacy likely relied heavily on oral traditions for their style and content. As the use of runic script seems limited to stone, metal, wood, and bone objects during this period by virtue of the evidence, it seems that it was not used or meant for keeping extensive written records, this limited usage suggests that the spoken word remained the predominate feature in Old Norse culture. Even by the 13th century, the majority of the Scandinavian population remained illiterate in spite of the growing influence of books and the keeping of written records. It seems insufficient to simply accept an unspoken assumption of eddic poetry’s oral roots, but frustratingly, there is no way of fully separating oral influences from literary influences when analysing the textual material. There is perhaps a temptation to adhere to the belief that early medieval texts must have based their authority on the more known and established oral traditions, however, this hypothesis cannot be made without considering the effects of grammatical teaching.

The 9th century south Swedish Rök stone and other early runic objects could be advantageous for the study of oral poetry by virtue of its dating. Runic material earlier than 10th century could arguably be said to be among the closest representation of the oral poetic tradition available, and thus it could serve as a helpful gauge when analysing eddic poetry like that preserved in *R*. Although the matter of runic inscriptions is rather

⁴⁷ Harris 1985: 112

complex, in brief, it will serve as possible evidence for some issues concerning orality and the oral tradition of eddic poetry. As the central theme in this thesis is to theorise the possible circumstances that allowed for the making of *R*, the aim of this chapter is to establish eddic poetry's oral roots wherever possible and to maintain that such a manuscript survived in part because its authority came from valued oral traditions and a flourishing interest in poetic diction and style in what can be thought of as a literary awakening in Iceland.

Source criticism regarding *R* threatens to invalidate discussion of the orality of its eddic poetry as it is argued that *R* is thought to have been compiled from a lost mother manuscript we may call the Regius Compilation (c.1240); this compilation in turn is hypothesised to have been compiled from what we might call the A collections (older than 1240). The A collections probably encompassed various eddic poems in no obvious order and is assumed to have attained its material from some form of scribal recording of the oral narratives.⁴⁸ However, what could be of key interest is comparing and contrasting varying versions of the same tales. Multiple versions on the one hand could suggest literary borrowings from common written sources or they could indicate origins from a common oral tradition or narrative store.

To discuss indications of literary borrowings or influences from the oral tradition, I have chosen to focus mainly on *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I and II (HH and HHII) from *R* as these are alternate versions of the same tale. I have chosen corresponding poems from the same compilation as opposed to analysing comparative poems between *R* and *A* because the differences between the two poems collected by the same source are perhaps equally as telling as analysing poems from different sources. Evidence of differing versions of one tale might elucidate if Old Norse oral narratives were memorised or improvised as with the Yugoslavian bards in Alfred and Lord's study or it could point to literary corruptions. HH represents the first instalment of poems in the Heroic divide of *R* and encompasses what is called the Helgi hero-cycle.

It is customary to speak of two separate lays of Helgi Hundingsbani, marked I and II according to their order in *R*. The first of the two appears to be a cohesive poem, with no prose inserts, comparatively well preserved and evidently one of the younger dated

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis, see Gustav Lindblad 1954

poems in the heroic section. However, the second poem, HHII, appears to be made up of remnants of at least two poems or perhaps more. It is a combination of verse and prose, with the bulk of the verse devoted to the direct speech of the characters. Unlike HH, the second poem refers to the non-Christian ideology of reincarnation as well as a lost tale of Helgi and Kára.

The apparent editing and prose synopsis in HHII where the poem corresponds to HH provides evidence of a literary construction, whereas the heavy use of formulaic language, motifs, and metre among other features might suggest habits from the oral tradition. It could of course be argued that the oral traits mentioned could have, by the 13th century, been simply adopted and developed by the literary tradition, but when viewed in light of the formulaic verse and language on such examples as the Rök stone, Karlevi stone (c.1000), and perhaps even the Norwegian Tune stone (c.400), it seems insufficient to exclude the notion that the oral tradition had little-to-no influence on the poems in *R*.

The question of interest is whether the eddic poems in *R* are written in the spirit of the oral tradition, or are they strictly literary constructions? The two versions of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* will be analysed in terms of their seemingly oral and literary traits, first discussing the issue of kennings, then the recurrent hero motif in eddic poetry, and finally the *senna* as a compositional unit and feature more in accord with the oral tradition than the rest of the poem.

Kennings and the Oral Tradition

The oral tradition in general is often characterised by formulaic language, stock scenes, repetition of themes and motifs, set runs and refrains, standard topoi and metaphors. However, surpassing all of these formal characteristics is the fact that the “work” exists only as it is embodied in performance.⁴⁹ It is the performing of formulaic narratives accompanied by tone of voice, stress, gestures and perhaps music that essentially makes the oral tradition complete, and thus, any written record that seeks to

⁴⁹ Kellogg 1973: 56-7

represent the tradition can be thought of as orally derived texts or written in the spirit of the oral tradition. The transition from performance to script can be likened to the difference between hearing and seeing a song performed and reading the plain lyrics. Thus what we find in orally derived texts is an imperfect account of a tradition which no amount of writing can fully capture. On the other hand, writing can represent oral metre, formulaic language, themes and imagery, and it is these elements that I will discuss further.

The poetic metre, as Robert Kellogg points out,

...constitutes a special body of linguistic rules, beyond those required for everyday discourse, which produces well formed measures of verse, even in extemporaneous performance. The demands of metre work in tandem not only with features of grammar but with traditional diction as well. The formulaic expressions so prominently associated with orally composed poetry are shaped by, and employed to conform to, the poetical 'grammar' of oral composition, as well as to the larger semantic and cultural features of the tradition.⁵⁰

Remnants of these types of compositional rules can be found throughout the corpus of traditional Germanic poetry. One prominent oral poetical feature that is chiefly characteristic of Germanic poetic diction is the kenning. Described in the Medieval Scandinavia Encyclopaedia, the word *kenning* is a female noun derived regularly from the weak verb *kenna*, which in the verb phrase *kenna X við Y* means "to call X by Y's name," or designate X by Y. In its simplest form, a kenning consists of two noun members compounded together, with or without genitive linkage between them, for example, *benregn* or *benja regn* ("wound-rain" or "rain of wounds" = "blood").⁵¹ In short, it is a compound metaphor or phrase denoting a synonym for a common noun. Perhaps the most elaborate and detailed account of traditional poetic diction and the form and function of kennings can be found in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* where he denotes three grades of skaldic diction, the third being that of kennings. Although it is near impossible to identify whether a specific kenning originated from an oral tradition or was formulated in writing it seems however that this type of poetic construct could have had its roots in

⁵⁰ Kellogg 1988: 163

⁵¹ Medieval Scandinavia Encyclopaedia 1993: 351

an oral tradition. An indication of its oral roots can be found on various runic inscriptions from memorial stones⁵² to simple rune sticks.

The recorded usage of kennings in Old Norse can be dated as early as the 5th century as I intend to suggest in this chapter, but otherwise it is more commonly dated to the 9th century. Kenning usage ranges from different geographic locations to time periods and among different social groups—exemplified by the Tune stone, Rök stone, Karlevi stone, and the rune sticks⁵³ found at the wharf in Bergen, Norway. Arguably, many of the inscriptions from Bergen seem to be produced mainly by individuals without formal literary training such as merchants and fishermen. As this social group represents non-ecclesiastic or aristocratic individuals, they would not have had any formal Latin script training or much knowledge about reading books and literary schooling like the Icelandic writers of the eddic and skaldic collections. Yet kennings can be found both on these humble inscriptions and in the elaborate codices of Iceland. This proposed lack of formal ‘book’ training and literary editing suggests that the Bergen material would perhaps be closer to an oral tradition as opposed to a literary one. As Guðún Nordal has noted, “the mastery of the necessary writing skills and the possession of parchment were clearly imperative and these were expensive commodities. This means that those less privileged would not have had the same opportunity to put their poems into writing as those who belonged to the clergy or affluent section of the laity.”⁵⁴ Given that those responsible for the production of manuscripts, and ultimate the production of *R*, were probably scholars or at least trained in the study of *grammatica*, many of the specific word combinations found in *R* could easily have been and in large part probably were literary constructions based on standardised textual poetic forms devised for writing vernacular poetry. However, it could also be argued that these poetic rules may not have been strictly literary constructs and had their basis in the traditional oral poetic rules. I base this

⁵² I refer here to the Karlevi Stone. Based on the dating and manuscript-like organisation of the stone, with the inscription reading from left to right, neatly lined sentences and punctuations, it could be argued that the stone exemplifies traits of the literary tradition rather than the oral. However, it seems that rune stones were often commissioned, meaning that the composer of the verse and the carver of the inscription do not have to be the same person, for this reason the verse could have been composed orally and then told to and memorised by the carver who then designed the layout fashioning it after the book tradition. The latter theory entails that the verse could be oral-formulaic despite its appearance.

⁵³ These rune sticks are thought to be dated from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, and include a variety of material from everyday discourse to poetic material to prayers, love letters and obscenities.

⁵⁴ Nordal 2001: 8

hypothesis in part on the Latin model of *grammatica*, which not only valued studies in poetry among other classical texts, but made use of material from pre-Christian poets as part of the curriculum.⁵⁵ Early studies in *grammatica* in Iceland most likely utilised the Latin *Ars Grammatica* and it seems logical to infer that when literary studies in the vernacular were first established Icelandic textual culture was still somewhat in its infant stages. Therefore, scholars would likely have turned to the more familiar ancient tradition of oral poetry as their foundation. This brings me back to the discussion of kennings.

Kennings are most commonly found in both the eddic and skaldic material for example when referring to swords and ships. In HH, the kennings for a sword such as *ítrlaucr* ‘shinning leek’ (V.7, L.8.), *blóðormr* ‘blood snake’ (V.8, L.7), and compounds for a ship such as *stagstiórnmarr* ‘stay-bridled wave-horse’ (V.29, L.7), or *brimdýr* ‘surf-beast’ (V.50, L.7) are not found in any other poems in *R*. These seemingly exclusive compounds could suggest that they were deliberately created or used in the written poem, which would mean that the HH poem, from the time it was first formally recorded or modified in *R*, is for the most part a literary construction as opposed to a verbatim or memorised recording from an oral tradition. There is no way of actually knowing which kenning is traditionally from oral poetry and which was created by a scholar but perhaps what could be thought of as orally derived are the rules and imagery which govern the arrangement of kennings. For example, the imagery of a ‘wave-horse’ or ‘sea-horse/beast’ as epithets for “ship” can be paralleled in other eddic poems such as *Sigrdrifumál* V10. *seglmarr* ‘sail-horse, or *Hymiskviða* V 20. *hlunngoti* ‘wave-horse’ or ‘roller-stallion’, V 24. *hreingálcu*⁵⁶ ‘sea-wolf’, V26. *flotbrúsi* ‘floating-goat’, V27. *lögfákr* ‘sea-stallion’ and *brimsvín* ‘sea-pig’ or ‘surf-pig’, and finally in *Reginismál* V 16. *Rævils hestr* ‘the sea-king’s horse’, *segldvigg* ‘sail-steed’, *vágmarr* ‘ocean-charger’, V 17. *hlunnvigg* ‘roller-steed’. Interestingly, as in the case of HH, none of these specific kennings are repeated verbatim. On the one hand, it could be argued that if these exact compounds had been a fixed part of the common store, they would be extant in other traditional poems. Conversely, it could be argued that the common store simply dictates

⁵⁵ Irvine 1996

⁵⁶ Carolyne Larrington has translated *hreingálcu* as ‘sea-wolf’ but she perhaps made this suggestion based on the context of the verse. In the *Glossary to the Poetic Edda* 1992 however, it has been translated as ‘reindeer enemy’: wolf.

the rules for formulating kennings, and the word choice would be the poet's prerogative.⁵⁷ To strengthen this latter hypothesis, a comparative study of kennings on rune sticks would be helpful to identify any patterns or correlations with kennings in *R*.

If we were to adopt the idea that the rules and imagery for creating narrative diction such as kennings are traditional to the Germanic oral common store then perhaps we could make some sense of the similarities found in Old English poetry. Most scholars would agree that there is a sense of a greater poetic tradition that bares some commonality between Old English and Old Norse poetry which were probably spread by the contact between the respective cultures and not necessarily through books.

The Old Norse kennings for ship can be paralleled with its Old English counterparts. For example, *geofonhus* 'sea-house', *holmærn* 'sea-horse', *lagumearh* 'sea/water-horse', *yphof* 'wave-building', *ypmearh* 'wave-horse' and so forth.⁵⁸ Perhaps a more telling parallel is the Old Norse kenning *brimdýr* noted above and the Old English *brimhengest* 'sea-horse'. The identical word *brim* 'sea' followed by the imagery of an animal could point to not only linguistic similarities but also a poetic construct of similar influence, suggesting that the rules which dictate the formation of kennings might be found in both the Old English and Old Norse oral common store as opposed to strict literary borrowings. It has been argued by Thomas Gardner on the premises of Andres Heusler's study that the eddic and skaldic kenning tradition are younger than the Old English tradition and was perhaps influenced by it in one way or another.⁵⁹ This hypothesis then entails that kennings were introduced into the Germanic tradition by Old English poets. Would Gardner then also suggest that kennings found on Old Norse rune stones prior to 1000 AD were literary influences from Old English poets? And what of the notion that Old English poets were influenced by a conglomerate culture of Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and hence Germanic? While I understand Gardner's point about the possibility of Old English verses modelled in part by Latin traditions, he ignores any mention of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic oral influences. Gardner's suggestion also seems to

⁵⁷ These kennings are of course relatively simple and more obvious in their meaning as opposed to many of the Skaldic kennings, for example, in *Skáldskapamál* a ship is expressed as *roesinaðr* 'fore-sheets-snake' [60-61], and *foerir bjorn* 'twisted-rope-bear' [61]. The greater mastery of both language and imagery in the Skaldic material could be due in part to more highly trained scholars, or a greater familiarity with the literary tradition.

⁵⁸ Gardner 1969: 112

⁵⁹ Gardner 1969: 111.

avoid the possibility that similar trends, such as composing genealogies, or employing metaphoric or epithetical language, common to the oral tradition, can exist in widely different cultures, from different geographic locations without necessarily having any influence on one another as seen in studies ranging from classical Greek and Roman literature, to early Icelandic texts, to modern Yugoslavian and African oral cultures. Furthermore, due to a range of similarities between the Old English and Old Norse language, it is not unlikely that one could find a variety of parallels in the poetic grammar that do not have to be directly related. On the other hand, these similarities might indicate shared influences either by oral or literary traditions.

The oldest surviving literary record containing a *dróttkvætt* stanza in runes can be found on the Karlevi stone in Öland Sweden, dated to c. 1000. The prose section of the text identifies the chieftain buried beneath the stone and states his comrade's intention of making a memorial in his honour, while the poetic portion eulogises the fallen chieftain. Transcribed into Old Norse the inscription reads:

S[t]æ[inn] [sa]s[i] es sattr æftiR Sibba Goða, sun Fuldars, en hans liði satti at ...
 ... Fulginn liggR hinns fylgðu, flæstr vissi þat, mæstaR dæðiR dolga ÞrúðaR
 draugR í þæimsi haugi; munat Ræið-Viðurr raða rogstarkR í Danmarku [Æ]ndils
 iarmungrundaR uRgrandaRi landi.⁶⁰

The use of the two kennings *ÞrúðaR draugR* 'battle-tree of [the Goddess] Þrúðr' meaning chieftain, and *Ræið-Viðurr* 'Viðurr-of-the-Carriage of [the Sea-king]' meaning a master sailor/warrior exemplifies perhaps poetic diction common to oral traditions but could also be evidence of early literary knowledge.

The Rök stone inscription, a highly intricate and multi faceted display of runic writing, shows that heroic legends in verse form were known in Sweden in the early 9th century. It is covered with runes on five sides with the exception of the base that was to be buried under ground. While a detailed analysis of the contents is best left to runologists and somewhat out of the scope of this thesis, I would nonetheless like to use

⁶⁰ Samnordisk Runtextdatabas. One translation from the database reads: This stone is placed in memory of Sibbi the good, Fuldarr's son, and his retinue placed on ... He lies concealed, he who was followed by the greatest deeds (most men knew that), a chieftain (battle-tree of [the Goddess] Þrúðr) in this howe. Never again shall such a battle-hardened sea-warrior (Viðurr-of-the-Carriage of [the Sea-king] Endill's mighty domain (= God of the vessels of the sea), rule unsurpassed over land in Denmark.

this example for the discussion of eddic verse and the oral tradition. Some scholars believe the rune-master to be a type of Scandinavian Widsith, who guards a storehouse of riddles, poems and ancient lore, now lost and impossible to retrieve.⁶¹ The allusions and formulaic structure are so cryptic that they cannot be fully understood without sufficient knowledge or access to the legendary tradition. Lars Lönnroth points out that “certain formulas and formulaic patterns are symmetrically repeated within each of the three main sections” and that these formulas “have been compared to the formulas introducing the mythological riddles in *Vafþúðnismál* and similar didactic poems of the Edda.”⁶² There is also use of the *ljóðahátt* and *fornyrðislag* verse and a name-list which is perhaps a poetic *pula* in *fornyrðislag*.⁶³ The inscription employs a few kennings such as *Hreiðgoti* a kenning referring to the movement or ‘nesting’ habits of the Goths and *Hreiðmarr* ‘referring to the Goth ruled shores or literally ‘sea’ which in turn could mean ‘territory’. Additionally, there seems to be an extreme interest in number relations riddles. In terms of content, the stone points to a pre-Christian era. Its highly crafted riddles, question and answer verses and its challenge to the intellect all point to possible oral traditional traits, and yet the punctuation marks on the stone marked by crosses, sentence structuring and layout, even the use of ciphers expose habits from literate training. This inscription is in many ways a riddle wrapped in an enigma in terms of its highly literate understanding of the oral tradition.

In establishing the possibility of kennings existing outside of any formal literary tradition, a late fourth to early 5th century Norwegian rune stone—the Tune stone⁶⁴—could provide an interesting although highly speculative example. The inscription has been transcribed and translated as:

Ek WiwaR after Woduride **witandihalaiban** worahto (runoR)

I Vi, in memory of Vodurid the **giver of bread**, wrote these runes

⁶¹ Lönnroth 1977: 2

⁶² Lönnroth 1977: 8

⁶³ Lönnroth 1977: 9

⁶⁴ “The Tune stone, which originally marked a chieftain’s grave, was found built into the churchyard wall at Tune in Østfold, Norway. It is of red granite and has runes on two faces, probably carved in the 5th century” Kristjánsson 1977: 27. The inscription containing alliterative lines represents the carving on only one of the two sides.

Although I have not seen this Old Norse phrase argued as representing a kenning, it nonetheless seems to be a metaphor or arguably a kenning where for example, X – a chieftain is called by Y –giver of bread. Thus the compound *witandihalaiban* could perhaps be a kenning for a chieftain. I base this argument on the notion that early memorial inscriptions of this kind were traditionally reserved for chieftains, royalty, or warriors of certain distinction, thus, it would make sense if the phrase refers to a chieftain—someone who could be seen as the “bread-winner” or chief provider rather than denoting a baker per se. On the other hand, “*witandihalaiban*” could simply be a title adjective like that of Haraldr blátönn, or Helgi Hundingsbani, but the term seems to be more cryptic. To further support this claim, it is necessary to search for traces of similar phrases used to describe a chieftain or head of a household in other sources. We know that kennings are a common poetic trait in the Old Norse tradition and although it would take some work to fit the inscription into a *fornyrðislag* verse of the eddic kind, the obvious poetic rhythm, and double alliteration do suggest a formulaic pattern and consequently a kind of oral poetry that could be interconnected with both skaldic and eddic poetic traits.

If perhaps this interpretation of the Tune stone is too farfetched, then it should be observed that even if the tradition of kennings came from a foreign literary tradition, the rules still had to be adopted and remembered in the Old Norse oral culture for at least 200 years from the time of the oldest accepted Scandinavian example of a kenning (c.1000) to the proposed date eddic poetry was first formally written on parchment (c.1200). Not to mention that the tradition of kennings had to somehow make its way from, for example, the Karlevi stone in Sweden or rune sticks in Bergen to the eddic poetic tradition in Iceland or visa versa.

Although many of the kennings found in *R* could arguably be literary constructions, more broadly, the stylistic features of kennings seem to point to pre-literate origins and oral poetry in general as oppose to a particular poem or tale.

The Helgi-Hero Motif and the Common Store

Key to oral narrative would be a concept termed in this thesis as the common store. To follow up the discussion in chapter 1, the common store can be thought to provide all the heroic and mythic material, stock characters, set diction, phrases, themes, motifs and so forth. Basically, this store would include all the necessary elements and formulaic rules one would need to create a tale out of a legend or historical events, or build new tales employing the oral formulaic rules to establish its legitimacy in the tradition. The common store can be thought of as such: to begin with, there must exist an oral society or culture which produces a generic oral tradition, supported and transmitted by a significant number of its members. The material contents of this tradition, i.e. the formulaic elements that make up the foundations of a given story, are dictated by the tradition and upheld in the collective memory. The contents within the common store would therefore provide the foundation for all pre-literate narratives such as the sagas, mythic and heroic poetry. It is essentially the form and metre that differentiates the narrative but the diction and imagery would remain rather standard for each theme represented. In other words, there seems to be a generic language and way of setting up a narrative including physical descriptions of “the hero as warrior or saint”, “lamenting widow”, “the villain”, “the role of supernatural aids” to name a few.⁶⁵ Thus, given that the audience of Old Norse narratives were mostly unfamiliar with texts, the set formulaic ways of building various vernacular narratives would likely have been taken from the more familiar oral traditions, at least when the first poems were recorded on parchment.

Traditionally thought to be a characteristic of oral narratives are stock motifs. An archetypal example of a stock motif in the eddic corpus would be the Helgi-hero type. This particular hero motif stakes its claim as a stereotypical feature and archaic structure, which the compiler emphasises by paralleling the poems on the life of Helgi Hundingsbani, with reference to the repeated motif in *Károlióð* (a lost poem) and *Helgi Hjörvarðsson*. The compiler makes known the connection by mentioning in various prose passages that Helgi Hjörvarðsson and his valkyrie bride Sváva are thought to be

⁶⁵ A more general discussion can be found in Joseph Campbell's, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Bollingen Series XVII, Princeton UP 1973, and Vladimir Propp's, *Morphology of the Folktale*, transl. by Lawrence Scott, Univ. of Texas Press; 2nd rev. ed. 1968.

reincarnated as Helgi Hundingsbani and the valkyrie Sigrún, and later as Helgi Haddingiascaði and Kára—also a valkyrie. In Joseph Harris’ 1983 article on “Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry” he comments that,

the two Helgis [Hundingsbani and Hjörvarðsson] share so many biographical features that folklorists oriented scholars regard them as ultimately the ‘same’ probably variants derived from a common ritual pattern in which a Helgi ‘the hallowed one’ mated with a goddess, probably of tribal sovereignty, and was ritually slain by a near relative.⁶⁶

How or why this ritual pattern was created is perhaps best left to historians of religion, but suffice to say that this pattern was probably at one time a familiar theme and traditional to the Old Norse oral narratives. From information given by the compiler of *R*, the Helgi-hero motif was at least important or widespread enough to be reproduced in at least three different but corresponding poems and it can be imagined that the Helgi in *Károlióð* met a similar fate as the other Helgis. To emphasise the popularity of this motif further, the widely depicted Völsung hero Sigurðr can also be seen as conforming to the Helgi-hero type whose life and death is interconnected with supernatural aids, such as the valkyrie with whom the hero falls in love.

The relationship of the poems employing the Helgi-hero type alludes to a bigger picture existing before and beyond the individual tales.

Each poem either read separately or together seem to allude to a characteristic quality of the oral tradition whereby, as maintained by Gísli Sigurðsson,

it is generally assumed that the audience is familiar with the story material and the main characters beforehand, and a typical performance extends only to individual incidents from, the immanent whole, the conceptual saga as it exists as the sum of its parts at the preliterate stage. This immanent whole is never told in full and exists only in the minds of the members of the traditional culture, and only achieves an integrated form when the story comes to be written down.⁶⁷

This assumed familiarity is perhaps why the compiler does not have to tell the legend in full, but simply refer to parts of it or various tales that spawn from the full legend.

Reference to the bigger picture can be found in the *senna* between Guðmundr and Helgi’s half brother Sinfiötli. In HH verse 36, Guðmundr heaps insult on Sinfiötli by unearthing memories from his past:

⁶⁶ Harris 1983: 214.

⁶⁷ Sigurðsson 2002: 45.

‘Fát mantu, fylkir, fornra spialla,
 er þú oðlingom ósonno breddr;
 þú hefir etnar úlf krásir
 oc broeðr þínom at bana orðit,
 opt sár sogin með svolom munni,
 hefr í hreysi hvarleidr scridit.’⁶⁸

This verse refers to a tale not included in *R* of Sinfiötli’s exploits as a werewolf. Guðmundr accuses him of sleeping, eating and living like a wild animal as opposed to living in the halls like a man. During this episode (preserved in chapter eight of the *Völsunga saga*), Sinfiötli kills one of his half-brothers for revealing Sigmundr and himself while they were attempting to take revenge on Siggeirr. By referring to a story outside *R*, the verse implies a degree of knowledge expected of the audience, and perhaps points towards a generic legend.

For the common store to function, it has to be known by the majority, and exist as part of the cultural fabric. Over time, foreign or situational influences and trends, such as the introduction of writing and editing, can affect material in the store, but these changes would only happen gradually.

The *Senna* as a Compositional Unit

It should be clear by now that *R* exhibits evidence of both literary constructions and presumably oral-formulaic elements. Yet, the evidence in favour of supporting oral roots for the *R* poems has thus far been inescapably shrouded by the fact that they have no doubt been edited, and worked on in a literary milieu. There is however another feature that is arguably written in the spirit of the oral tradition, and that is the *senna*.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Transl. by Larrington 1996: 119. Little must you recall, lord, the old stories/ when you taunt the princes with untruth;/ you have eaten the leavings of wolves/ and been the slayer of your brother,/ often you’ve sucked wounds with a cold snout;/ hated everywhere, you’ve crept into a stone-tip.

⁶⁹ By definition, “the words *senna* and *mannjafnaðr* refer to hostile verbal matches in which two or more contenders by boasts and insults, imputations and rebukes, or other degrading devices to try to injure each other’s honour, or encroach upon each other’s social prestige. Although it is generally accepted that verbal duelling originates in real-life practices, scholars have reached no consensus about its generic status”. Medieval Scandinavia 1993: 571.

If Harris is right in believing that the *senna* represents a compositional unit seemingly outside of the narrative or poem, then it might be the case that these comic battle-of-words are arguably adopted from traditional oral poetry, and perhaps even more easily recalled verbatim. One could think of the *senna* as a type of chorus or central dialogue, a sub-genre, perhaps even an archaic version of the Rap genre or *the dozens* (free-style battling).⁷⁰ Either way, the rhythmic volleying of wit, words and insults easily provides for entertainment and appeal. Like a familiar trademark refrain, the *senna* would perhaps be one of the few features that could arguably be thought of as fixed in the oral or collective memory as opposed to regular verses that are more easily corrupted as is evident in the narrative differences between HH and HHII.

A good example of the *senna* serving as a compositional unit as well as being plausible evidence of a repetitive fixed structure in the oral tradition can be seen by the compiler's behaviour in HHII. It seems at first that the compiler, when copying HHII, came to the beginning of the paralleling *senna*, probably thought that it was the same as in HH and omitted it to avoid unnecessary repetition. Compare:

HH V.32

Frá goðborinn	Guðmundr at því:
'Hverr er landreki ,	sá er liði stýrir ,
oc hann feicnalið	foerir at landi? ⁷¹

and HHII after V18.

Þá qvað Guðmundr, svá sem fyrr er ritað í Helgaqviðu:

'Hverr er fylkir ,	sá er flota stýrir,
oc feicnalið	foerir at landi? ⁷²

⁷⁰ Perhaps like the Rap genre, a *senna* could have been composed *ad hoc* in various instances while adhering to traditional and conventional imagery and phraseology, but the parallel I make between the two genres has more to do with the event of word battles and comical insults rather than any improvising quality. In fact, I would argue that the *senna* was primarily a fixed compositional unit in the oral tradition repeated and memorised.

⁷¹ Transl. by Larrington 1996: 118. Guðmundr asked, divinely-descended,/ 'Who is that ruler who leads the troop,/ who's brought the dangerous men to the shore?'

⁷² Transl. by Larrington 1996: 135. Then Guðmundr Granmarsson said, as is written above in the 'Poem of Helgi': Who is that ruler who leads the troop,/ who's brought the dangerous men to the shore?

Incidentally, *fylkir* and *flota* are synonyms for *landreki* and *stýrir*. The verses are practically identical and likely confused the compiler into thinking it was the same *senna* repeated. He mentions in the above prose insert that the verse is also written in HH. He goes on with the chronological events as in HH for about five stanzas and then realises that the two *sennur* are slightly different and abruptly writes in the rest of the *senna* for HHII in spite of the fact that it is chronologically misplaced.

To further emphasise the possibility of the *senna* representing a fixed compositional unit, I will briefly turn to Harris' analysis of the almost exact repetition between the verses in HH and HHII. He mentions that,

the six stanzas of the flyting in HHII correspond to a passage of 15 stanzas in HH, 120 *fornyrðislag* half-lines compared with fifty, plus two prose inquit. The passages are most similar at the beginning (HHII 19, 20; HH 32, 33, 35) and especially at the end (HHII 23, 24; HHII 45, 46). They share twelve lines, exactly repeated, in common, and eleven of those exactly shared lines occur in the last two stanzas (within 16 lines of HH, 18 of HHII).⁷³

The sheer bulk of corresponding lines and details between the two *sennur* in spite the fact that the rest of the verses are intended to tell the Helgi tale differently, coupled with the notion that the compiler initially opted to omit the *senna* in HHII provides sufficient supporting evidence to maintain that the *senna* represents compositional units that were perhaps traditionally fixed, easily recalled, and therefore more likely to be written in the spirit of the oral tradition, if not verbatim recordings, as opposed to the regular verses. Helgi Þorláksson has pointed out that feuding was so innately ingrained in Icelandic culture that the Church was powerless to stop it, and at times the clergy would act as intermediaries or arbitrators for the feuding parties.⁷⁴ Þorláksson highlights that, “Disputes were often conducted according to unwritten rules, and these are what we call feuds. Feuds were exchanges of insults and/or violent acts against property and persons. The phases in a feud took place by turns, with only one of the parties moving at a time, as in a game of chess.”⁷⁵ This slight divergence serves to suggest that the act of feuding was an important part of the social legal structure of Iceland and its relevance is exemplified

⁷³ Harris 1983: 216.

⁷⁴ Þorláksson 2005: 148

⁷⁵ Þorláksson 2005: 148

by the question of feud and honour being a popular subject for storytelling as the sagas and, in part, the eddic *sennur* demonstrates.

In short, this unit or sub-genre is typologically identifiable. Although stereotyped in their contents and nature of compositional insults, attack and counter attack, they are variable in form, most likely traditional in content, and to an extent structurally and contextually predictable.⁷⁶ Although a wider survey of all *sennur* in the eddic material is needed to better affirm this hypothesis, suffice to say that often the most accurately remembered aspects to any song, poem, or fairytale is the chorus or as in this case trademark dialogue.

The eddic poems of *R* can neither be fully argued as written in the spirit of the oral tradition nor strictly as literary constructions. Rather the poems should be seen as a type of transitional literature between the oral and literary tradition combining secular oral art forms and Latin/ecclesiastical book tradition and learning. I have attempted to show that the poems in *R* visibly represent an interplay between orality and literacy, which scholars of the last 3 decades have argued as being characteristic of the early middle ages.

The unspoken assumption that eddic poetry was oral poetry has its basis in part on the age of the *fornyrðislag* metre found in many of *R* poems. This metre can also be found on the pre-Christian Rök stone suggesting that the verse was possibly a feature of oral poetics that existed both on the Scandinavian mainland and Iceland. The metre could have been developed, performed, preserved, and transmitted throughout the different geographic locations initially without the use of writing. Further oral roots of eddic poetry in *R* can be argued in light of the Karlevi stone and rune sticks from Bergen where evidence of kennings existing outside the formal literary tradition and, in the case of the rune sticks, among secular people with little-to-no formal literary training. Moreover, if one accepts the idea that the Tune stone can be seen as an early *fornyrðislag* metre or at least formulaic metre which exemplifies an early model of a kenning, then it can be maintained that kennings and the alliterative rhyme have been part of the Old Norse tradition from as far back at the 5th century AD.

⁷⁶ Harris 1983: 220.

In sum, kennings, poetics, the *fornyrðislag* verse, the Helgi-hero motif, and the *senna* were arguably part of a type of collective memory and common store. From this store all poetic rules, diction, motifs, stock characters and so forth represent part of a greater cultural legend, and it is from this central legend that various tales of mythic and heroic characters were born and later preserved in part in *R*. Although exploring the possibility of oral roots within literary texts remains wrought with controversy, the attempt to establish links to sources such as runic material has been made in the hopes of presenting both the complexity of such studies and providing a beacon to navigate through these otherwise murky waters. Further research in the field of Old Norse oral tradition and eddic poetry is both necessary and crucial to understanding why these presumably pagan poems observed a renaissance in 13th century Iceland in spite of religious and political efforts to stamp out pagan beliefs and practices.

Chapter 3

Iceland, the Study of *Grammatica*, and the Development of Secular Literature

Two important questions need to be addressed: why verse rooted in pagan culture enjoyed such unflagging prestige in a Christianized culture in the High Middle Ages – and how it came to be the preferred medium for deeply religious poetry in the twelfth century, and to hold that position until the end of the fourteenth century, when skaldic metre gave way to new verse forms. The answers to these questions lie partly in the relationship between formal school learning and skaldic verse in Iceland.

Guðrún Nordal 2004⁷⁷

Once writing has been introduced to a culture, the nature of communication and understanding changes. A reader is able to scrutinise texts and view information objectively relying less on memory and word of mouth and more on the ‘permanence’ of written documentation. Habits of organising, editing, keeping records and referencing of information change. Information is able to build up with written records rather than assimilate as in the oral tradition.

Information begins to be weighed against and verified through written records, and what constitutes as facts and truth acquire the authority increasingly from texts rather than relying on professional orators using oral traditions. Essentially the nature of communication and cultural awareness inevitably changes. Unlike the oral tradition where tales of past events adapt with successive generations to explain current realities as seen in chapter 1 with the Gonja tribe, the literate culture enables history to be a more fixed story and a datable point in time.

Once the technology of writing, in this case the runic script, is introduced into the Old Norse culture we can cautiously maintain that the development from oral narratives to written literature essentially begins although it can be considered a rather long and slow process. Many of the earliest written records can be thought to contain a kind of tribal encyclopaedia in the way genealogies have often been included in the material be it on memorial stones or sagas written on parchment. Central to much of the early Scandinavian writings is undoubtedly the use of poetry and poetic language as a narrative vehicle.

⁷⁷ Nordal 2001: 7

Archaeological and historical evidence have revealed a fairly widespread use of runic inscriptions on stone, bone, wood, metal, and at a later period in some manuscripts. From the findings of these records it seems that Scandinavians expressed an interest in linguistics and poetry from a reasonable early stage which estimates the first experiments of a writing system to the 1st century AD. As previously mentioned, it is uncertain how many Scandinavians could actually write runes, but it is believed, in light of remnants of memorial publicly placed rune stones, that a larger number could at least read runic writing and thus, it can be inferred that writing, however scarce, played a somewhat complementary role to Old Norse oral tradition and poetics. It could also be inferred that poetry was an important and valued part of the oral culture and consequently the vernacular literary culture, as we will see in this chapter. Interestingly however, no runic material is found in Iceland before 1200, and yet Iceland surpassed the rest of Scandinavia in the technological skill of writing the vernacular with Latin script. How and why Iceland managed to supersede the rest of Scandinavia in literary endeavours could perhaps have something to do with the high concentration of monasteries and the subsequent implementation of institutionalised pedagogical studies.

The affect of Christian ideology on the Scandinavia culture is profoundly seen in relation to writing practices. Needless-to-say, the conversion affected more than a simple change over of scripts. Latin grammatical studies helped provide a model for developing studies in vernacular linguistics and likely served as a model for the development of vernacular literary activities. Each technology—the runic and Latin script—had been adapted to particular kinds of communication and each seemed to preserve particular kinds of texts. The runic script was mainly used for the production of memorial stones, magical incantations, nametags for merchandise and brief messages or notations, while the Latin script was used for more lengthy productions such as, religious books, sagas, historical records, inventories and so forth. It seem that the Latin script was more suited and reserved for use on parchment while the angled twigs of the futhark was better suited for carving on wood and stone for example. Not to mention that parchment was incidentally more expensive than the latter materials and so less likely to be accessible to just anybody. As with medieval orality and literacy, there can be observed a certain cohabitation between the runic and Latin script in that although they served somewhat

different functions, the mentality behind the general use of script to relay information had perhaps been mutually influential.

Around the year 1000 AD, Christianity was formally introduced to Iceland by the prompting of the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason. The relatively unstable economic and political situation in Iceland during this period, with its limited resources and fluctuating leaderships among the chieftains perhaps provided favourable conditions for the establishment of churches. Despite the changes on the local culture as a result of the new religion and institutions, it is unlikely that this was the first exposure Icelanders had to the religion, books, and the technology of writing. Subsequent Viking raids of foreign monasteries coupled with a history of trading and settling in continental Europe and elsewhere suggest a previous exposure to these foreign imports. However, this would have been the first time the art of reading and writing became institutionalised with the establishment of formal schools devoted to studies of *grammatica* and religious undertakings. In accordance with various research including that of Guðrún Nordal's *Tools of Literacy*, the study of *grammatica* or the first of the arts of discourse in early medieval school curricula, should be understood as not simply the elementary study of the Latin language, but more as a systematic study and interpretation of literary texts and figurative language.⁷⁸ While the sources do not reveal the exact curriculum and reading list for the students in the early schools in Iceland, it is likely that they would have studied various Latin texts both religious and secular, a point I will discuss more concisely in this chapter. So advanced was the curriculum and material that it is told in *Jóns saga* (composed in 1262—1264) that Bishop Jón of Hólar (d.1121) invited some of the finest masters to instruct his students not only in grammar but chanting and versification.⁷⁹ In other words, the education included all the tools that were required for religious studies and were later also applied to secular, practical and artistic ventures.

By the 13th century, evidence of both Latin works and secular vernacular works compiled together in various manuscripts could be found. This evidence, in short, suggests that there was a preamble of Latin secular textbooks spanning back perhaps several centuries that likely paved the way for the use of and interest in the study of

⁷⁸ Nordal 2001: 21

⁷⁹ Saga of Bishop Jón of Hólar, p. 611.

secular Icelandic material. Essentially, the study of *grammatica* should be understood in as being a prerequisite for participating in the emerging writing culture in Iceland. *Grammatica* can be thought to provide the students with the basic instruments for participating in a textual culture that formed the basis of all learned discourse.

One would think that studies of *grammatica* administered by the Church and for the Church would have opposed the use of these skills for any other purpose than that which related to the Church and its enterprises. And yet how did the multitude of skaldic and eddic literature manage to be recorded by and preserved in the keeping of bishops and noblemen alike? This chapter focuses on the introduction and development of reading and writing in Iceland and the rise of a secular literary culture, which resulted in the making and preservation of *R* and other specialised codices.

Medieval Iceland in Brief

Iceland was first settled around 870 according to the *Íslendingabók* (Book of Icelanders) written by Ari fróði between 1120—1130. Pre-Christian Iceland was settled by mostly Norwegians from the Western districts, and Scandinavians that had previously settled in the British Isles bringing with them Celtic people.⁸⁰

Scandinavians of the Viking Age and earlier seem to have excelled as craftsmen whether it was in the form of decorative rune stones, sculptures, metalwork or tapestry. However archaeological findings of these objects or the lack there of in Iceland seems to suggest that Icelanders either had little talent in these areas or more likely were compelled to explore alternate enterprises to capitalise on because their volcanic stone was unfit for carvings, they had little timber, and no natural source of metal. What they had were long harsh winters that required a level of communal entertainment when they were unable to harvest wool or tend to agricultural matters. The medieval Icelandic economy was primarily pastoral, the livestock depended on sufficient grass for food over the winter, and given the island's location just south of the Arctic Circle, even a slight change in temperature, or an excess or absence of rain, could prove disastrous. According

⁸⁰ Documented in *Íslendingabók*.

to the Medieval Scandinavia encyclopaedia, the main emphasis up to the 1300's was on animal husbandry and some agriculture. Fishing provided an additional food supply in the coastal areas. Naturally, the food sources influenced the pattern of settlement.⁸¹

Void of towns and villages, medieval Iceland did not develop a regular market for its products, and farmers tried to remain as self-sufficient as possible not depending too much on regular imports.⁸² The undependable sub-arctic ecology, coupled with political and economical instability and Icelander's inclination to remain self-sufficient could have been a contributing factor in their adoption and integration of the Church. The integration of the new ecclesiastical culture in turn facilitated the ability to acquire and develop a new trade—book making. In the following centuries, Icelanders were not only able to supply the literary marketplace but were also able to hone their craft in storytelling. The development of their skills in storytelling resulted in the vibrant literature and poetry for which Icelanders were renowned.

Over the past two centuries, scholars have noted the astounding literary achievements of this obscure island that had been able to produce in the course of only 200 years—from the introduction of institutionalised grammatical learning—a level of literature that rivalled that of continental Europe. Countless scholars have devoted entire studies in attempts to answer how and why this materially poor, remote part of medieval European society was able to produce such rich and diverse literature. Unlike Scandinavia and continental Europe, Iceland had a degree of social flexibility, a rather high concentration of monasteries and educational centres, and a concentrated community of petty kings or chieftains that needed to find additional means of survival because of their limited exportable natural resources. As a result, this elite group of Icelanders were encouraged to consolidate power and capitalise on the technology of writing and manuscript production, and in turn became sought after by the other Scandinavian clergy and nobility for their craft.

Nordal points out two main approaches in which researcher use in attempt to explain how and why a remote country which was rather backward from an economical and technological standpoint could produce a profuse and highly developed literature.

⁸¹ Medieval Scandinavia Encyclopedia 1993: 312

⁸² Þorláksson 2005: 137

She cites the first approach as the comparative approach. This approach aims to discover the conditions that enabled the development of Icelandic literature in the literature of contemporary Europe. She notes,

...from a broad perspective it is clear that there is a connection, seeing that the precondition for Icelandic literature was writing in Latin and the literature and learning to which the Church's education had opened the door. We may assume that a part of the Icelandic population that gained such an education was also able to read other European literary languages, and we may therefore presume that both Latin literature and literature in the vernaculars were part of the background of learned Icelanders.⁸³

The second approach takes a more literary and sociological point of view. Through this method, researchers attempt to account for Icelandic literature against the backdrop of Iceland's historical and social circumstances. The argument maintains that an exceptional society, formed in exceptional circumstances, produced an exceptional literature.⁸⁴

Both arguments provide valid approaches for research, however, I am inclined to suggest that it would be beneficial to argue in terms of viewing the circumstances that led to the production of this exceptional literature having both to do with the exceptional situation and exposure to other secular literatures. Arguably, it is the possible exposure to alternate literature that could have led to the interest in and study of Icelandic skaldic poetry and pagan literature. *Jóns saga* mentions that chieftains would send their sons to be educated and fostered by the local Bishops. With some of the early leading bishops such as Ísleifr, son of Gizurr inn hvíti ("the White"), having been educated abroad it is plausible that he and others would have been exposed to both Latin and continental literature in circulation at the time and in turn brought this knowledge back to Iceland. It is fair to maintain that translations of other vernacular literature, such as *Tristan and Iseult* which was part of the *riddara sögur* (sagas of chivalry) a translation commissioned by King Hákon IV c. 1204—1263, would not have been of interest had there not been a knowledge of and market place for secular literature.

The study of *grammatica* was reserved for the privileged few and it was unlikely that many women and individuals outside the religious and secular elite were afforded the opportunity to study at one of the medieval institutions. Many instances of book

⁸³ Nordal 2001: 10

⁸⁴ Nordal 2001: 10-11.

production, manuscript compilation, or dictations required an acute sense of religious and secular literary material and a high level of understanding not just of the vernacular language and poetics, but also the Latin language and script. As the ability to read became more accessible and familiar among the secular elite so did the interest in secular literature. The demand for books gave rise to increased literary productions and a greater variety of literary material seen by the Icelandic sagas, eddic poetry and translations of the French medieval romance tradition among others.

Viewing the corpus of Icelandic produced manuscripts preserved it is clear that Icelanders made particular efforts to create a variety of literature, a variety that could have come in part as a result of an existing variety in the oral tradition. Artistically, they utilised the afforded Latin learning to experiment with and expand the boundaries of literature and poetics resulting in a supply and demand for both local and foreign literature.

Due to the fact that manuscripts were rather expensive and intensely time consuming to produce it is relatively safe to say that a sizable portion of secular manuscript codices were commissioned by private individuals. Some of these productions could also have been the product of the large farms, where they might have been read aloud to and enjoyed by the members of the household—to the learned and the laity alike. It is likely that the target audience would have had a substantial influence on the language, subject matter and point of view of the literature. Moreover, the exclusiveness of the Latin language meant that grammatical studies had to be adjusted to incorporate the vernacular grammar so as to meet the requirements of an audience that were mainly familiar with the Old Norse oral tradition, its public appeal is probably the reason why the literature was composed in the Norse language as opposed to say Latin. Clunies Ross writes that, “what Latin texts there were, were either translated into Old Norse, like Oddr Snorrason’s history of Óláfr Tryggvason from about 1190, or have been lost. The practice of reading aloud on the farms also contributed to the formation of the sagas’ oral rhetoric and objective style.”⁸⁵ We can infer that the particular efforts made to preserve texts written in Old Norse as opposed to Latin suggest that literature in the vernacular was of greater interest and demand to a larger audience.

⁸⁵ Clunies Ross 2005: 25-6.

With the lack of a centralised power, multiple petty kings, and retainers whose support could change at the drop of a hat, it is surely no wonder that Christianity and the book culture could have been adopted as a means to stabilise and secure political and social standing in Iceland and abroad during this period. As Clunies Ross maintains, “it is surely significant that, in medieval Scandinavia, the writing of history and the recording of Old Norse poetry largely became the preserve of Icelanders, people of a new, kingless society that had most to gain by writing themselves into history and writing the history of other people, especially Norwegians.”⁸⁶ Their keen endeavours resulted in a tactical and carefully nurtured move by the leading families of Iceland that allowed for not only a preservation of their traditional culture to a degree but also the adoption of a foreign import that would go on to provide the privileged few a certain education and means of livelihood.

The First Bishops and the Birth of a Formal Education System

At the turn of the 11th century and the introduction of a new religious establishment, many Icelandic chieftains adopted a kind of transitional role acting both as secular and religious leaders. Assuming this additional role in alliance with the Church was perhaps seen as a way to secure power for the chieftains on the one hand, and on the other hand, for the Church, it served as an opportunity to integrate into the local community as the chieftains’ supporters would have likely followed suit in the conversion. It was a tactical move and perhaps in many ways the only option for both parties to advance during this period of political and religious instability. Perhaps it was also an obvious transition for the political, religious, and social elite in Iceland at the time of conversion to become the new Christian elite. The notion that the chieftains were known as *goðar* has led to the assumption that their position originated from their function as religious leaders or ‘sacrificial priests’ in the pre-Christian era, however the material supporting a religious affiliation of the role of the *goði* is speculative. It was not until 1191 that this double role was forbidden by Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson, however, this allowed almost 200 years from the formal introduction of Christianity to the time of the ban for the chieftain-priest

⁸⁶ Clunies Ross 2005: 81

or *kirkjugóðar*⁸⁷ to set up schools at various chieftains' farms, in monasteries and at Episcopal seats. It was at these ecclesiastical establishments where formal education, authored works, and textual compilations took place.

Iceland's unique political/religious system during the early stages of the Conversion meant that it had no single dominant cultural centre. These early bishops, who probably held the oral traditional culture and poets with great esteem, ran the churches as well as many of the monastic and private schools in Iceland, and this adoption of local leaders into the Christian milieu was likely, in part, the saving grace of Old Norse pre-Christian poetry. Arguably, the result of the Church remaining under secular control to a greater degree than the rest of Europe could perhaps explain why Icelandic vernacular literature developed and flourished as it did.

This section aims to show how this dual role of the chieftain-priest provided favourable conditions for the support and enabling of vernacular secular literary productions to take place within the confines of Christian run establishments and become part of both religious texts and curriculum.

First and foremost, many of Iceland's early bishops can be thought of as having grown up in some of the country's wealthiest families that likely birthed and enjoyed a selection of mastered poets of the Old Norse oral tradition. Some of these poets have been known to serve as court poets to the other Scandinavian kings, while others were travelling poets for hire. The innate regard and esteem for the mastery of poetry and poets is perhaps evident not only in the Icelandic sagas' attention to tales of poets but the fact that many bishops continued to study and produce poetry. The testament of multiple copying and preservation of grammatical treatises such as *Snorra Edda* accounts for a continued appreciation of the art form in spite of the shift of medium. The shift of oral poetry to literary poetry entailed a marriage between different cultures, religion, and modes of communication. In order to participate in the Christian scriptural community, training in Latin grammatical studies was first required, and to start the first schools in Iceland the first bishops had to seek training abroad.

Ísleifr Gizurarson (c.1006), a clergyman and son of Gizzur inn hvíti of the Mosfellingar clan, founded one of the first training centres for priests and was the first

⁸⁷ Þorláksson 2005: 147

bishop of Skálholt (established in 1058). He was sent to Herford in Westphalia to obtain a classical education fitting for a priest. Two of Bishop Ísleifr pupils trained at his home in Skálholt were his sons Teitr (he later became one of Ari Þorgilsson informants), and Jón Ögmundarson, who went on to be the first Bishop of Hólar, the northern diocese in Iceland. Training of a similar kind subsequently took place at the bishopric of Hólar after it was established in 1106. Benedictine monasteries were established at Þingeyrar in 1133, at Munkaþverá in 1155, and Hítardalur in 1168. Additionally, Ísleifr's son Teitr ran one of the first private schools at the farm of Haukadalsr. It was here that Ari got his education. At the neighbouring farm of Oddi, the learned Sæmundr, who, according to tradition, had studied in Paris, founded a school at the end of the 11th century. According to the sources, Snorri Sturluson was later raised and educated on this farm. In the 13th century, Snorri's farm at Reykholt and other chieftains' farms developed as learning centres and engaged in literary productions.⁸⁸ The somewhat interrelated training and "inheritance" of knowledge afforded a build up of both foreign achieved training and localised understanding of "imported" knowledge. The pupils who later became teachers and scribes were able to achieve the best of both worlds by using their training in Latin to develop grammatical studies of the vernacular as we see in the *First Grammatical Treatise* (1GT) and *Snorra Edda*.

Books were produced at all these learning centres, and the heterogeneous seats of learning, with both ecclesiastical and secular aims and interests, promoted the various genres of the literature. No single ruler or institution was able to monopolise or dominate the writing process, and we can assume that, owning one of these institutions came to be part of an Icelandic magnate's prestige.

The adoption of the Christian faith was perpetuated by the leader of the Haukdælir⁸⁹, Gizurr inn hvíti, along with his son-in-law Hjalti Skeggjason and Hallr Þorsteinsson of Siða in the eastern part of Iceland.⁹⁰ In Gizur's time, or soon after, history began to be written in Iceland. The earliest example was a Latin account of the Norwegian kings by Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056—1133), which has not survived but is mentioned by many later writers, most revealingly in a late 12th century poem about

⁸⁸ Clunies Ross 2005: 25, Kristjánsson 1997

⁸⁹ Medieval Iceland had eight main leading families of which the Haukdælir was one of them.

⁹⁰ Medieval Scandinavia Encyclopedia 1993: 314.

Norwegian kings, *Nóregs konunga tal*.⁹¹ Referring back to the comparative approach of analysis regarding the necessary knowledge of other vernacular literature for the production of Icelandic literature, it is reasonable to maintain that the kings' sagas would perhaps not have developed as they did without generations of contact with European hagiography, historiography, and other literature that the Church and its leaders made available through the curriculum.

Part of the special circumstances in Iceland, such as the dual role of chieftains, likely accounted for a favourable climate for pre-Christian poetry during the conversion. As previously mentioned, poets and poetry held a respected and important position both in the pre-Christian and Christian society, and the Icelandic clergy for the most part recognised that poetry was to remain an elevated linguistic art form. One account that aptly illustrates the clergy's acceptance and adoption of the vernacular tradition is noted by Nordal where she writes,

Einarr Skúlason (c. 1100—c. 1160), the greatest poet of the 12th century, a priest and a court poet, successfully employed pagan metaphors in his skaldic diction in the deeply religious poem *Geisli*, the poetic *vita* of St. Óláfr Haraldsson composed in his honour about 1150 and first performed at the consecration of the archbishop's cathedral at Niðaróss in Norway. Einar was also a learned man. He was not, however, an isolated example in the 12th century. There occurred an exciting fusion between the oral tradition of skaldic verse-making and Latin textual culture in Einarr's cultural community.⁹²

A priest and a court poet whose religious poem rooted in skaldic diction was performed at the archbishop's consecration at Niðaróss, this information provides a vital insight into this seeming paradox of the Church's embrace of pagan poetry, of the dual roles of priest and poet, of the paradoxical interplay of ancient oral and new literate traditions. This hybrid of old and new traditions, roles, religions, and literature is essentially the defining characteristic of the medieval period, it is also perhaps why Stock, Richter, Ong and others previously mentioned scholars have argued for redefining how we are to understand this period and culture.

The account of Einarr Skúlason, illustrates among other things that the clergy were some of the primary producers, promoters and educators of skaldic material. Helgi

⁹¹ Sawyer 1993: 218

⁹² Nordal 2001: 8

Þorláksson notes another telling example citing that the monks of the Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar produced the oldest saga of St. Óláfr before 1180 and two sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvasson, one c.1190 and another somewhat later. Abbot Karl Jónsson, author of at least the beginning of a history of King Sverrir, was, by his own account, also from this monastery. It can also be asserted that a Benedictine monastery at Munkaþverá is also known for literary activities.⁹³ Christianity has long been thought of as the religion of “the book”, and in the medieval period the Church adapted this book culture to create a niche in the development and growth of both spiritual and secular literary endeavours.

A rather insightful example of on-going literary activities and amendments to texts can be found in Þorláksson’s illustration of Þingeyrar. The literary activities at this monastery show that the making of textual material was not a lone production. He writes,

...the monk Gunnlaugr at Þingeyrar made corrections to his saga of Óláfr Tryggvasson in accordance with some comments by Gizzur Hallsson, head of the Haukadalr family, and another monk there, Oddr, showed Gizzur his saga about Yngvarr víðörli (‘the Far-Traveller’) and probably wrote his saga of Óláfr Tryggvasson at Gizzur’s request. It should also be remembered that Gizzur was a *stallari*, a high official, at the court of King Sigurðr munnr (‘Mouth’), the alleged father of King Sverrir.⁹⁴

If we can take this account as representing a general approach to creating texts, then it can be maintained that writing and book production in Iceland during the medieval period was very much a communal effort that involved a series of checks and balances, improvements and approvals.

The surviving records we have of skaldic and eddic material must be seen as specifically selected and undoubtedly edited to fit the partiality of both the composer/compiler and the relevant culture. This approach also applies to how we should view the pre-Christian oral tradition and tales exemplified in the texts—as edited selections of a far greater and vibrant tradition. While it might appear that vernacular secular literature was whole-heartedly supported and publicized by the Church and its clerics, there remained a fine line as to what secular material could be considered acceptable.

⁹³ Þorláksson 2005: 147

⁹⁴ Þorláksson 2005: 147

In *Jóns saga*, written in the 13th century, Jón is said to have vehemently protested an unseemly pastime that was popular in which people recited back and forth, a man to a woman, and a woman to a man, verses which in his view were disgraceful and shameful and disgusting. It is written that he abolished and prohibited it unequivocally. He refused to listen to erotic poems or verses, or permit them to be recited; however, he was unable to abolish them entirely. It is told that he became aware that Klængr Þorsteinsson, who later became bishop of Skálholt but was at that time a young priestling, was reading a book called *Ovidius epistolarum*.⁹⁵ The book contains much erotic poetry, and Bishop Jón's defence for his prohibition was that it was difficult enough for someone to preserve himself from bodily lust and evil passion without kindling his mind to it by [bad] habits or poetry of this sort.⁹⁶ Bishop Jón's reaction can be seen as a reflection of clerical distaste in support of the prohibition but adds little to our knowledge of the tradition itself.⁹⁷ Consequently, the need for laws against such practices might also point to the survival of ancient oral traditions in the 12th century. It is uncertain however whether these traditions continued into the period after the laws had been fixed in writing. Moreover Klœingr's inclination towards 'frivolous' reading in spite of his religious teachings and imperial study of *grammatica*, suggest that if *grammatica* taught anything it was most certainly that there were many facets of language and literature to indulge in and appreciate. In turn, *grammatica* provided the necessary tools and inspiration to enable the creation of a multitude of literary genres and writing styles.

The array and abundance of literary production within this rather selected group of society exemplifies a detailed learning in grammatical studies. The uncontested dual-role some clerics seemed to have within the Church and secular community demonstrates a general cooperation to advance common goals and interests within this elite group. Þorláksson illustrates one such example by elucidating the good relationship enjoyed between Benedictine monks and the chieftain-priests, who sought assistance in their literary activities among the clerics at their church-manors (*staðir*). Interestingly, while

⁹⁵ As noted by Margaret Cormack, "this book is possibly the *Heroides Epistolae* [Letters of Heroines], a copy which was owned by Hólar cathedral in 1525. Another version of the saga gives the work as *De Arte*, that is, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* [The art of Love]. Both works are typical of the literature of courtly love popular in Europe" 2001: 625.

⁹⁶ saga ch needed.

⁹⁷ Quinn 2000: 36

there is no certain knowledge of the exact number of clerics serving simultaneously at Reyholt in Snorri's time, it can be maintained that there was probably no fewer than four, and may have been five.⁹⁸ Þorláksson also points out that the names of at least four clerics who served at Reyholt in the late 1220's are known and two of them were also legally trained. One of two latter clerics is Styrmir Kárason, an active scribe and composer of literary works.⁹⁹ It seems in some cases, as has been acknowledged, that the church-farm schools rivalled that of the monasteries in student body and perhaps also in production. As far as teaching, learning and literary activities were concerned, the communities of clerics at Stafholt and Reykholt may well have been just as important as Þingeyrar and Munkaþverá. The apparent number of monks at each of the monasteries was relatively small; before 1300 it was no more than five, a number that Þorláksson maintains is comparable to that of the five clerics at each of the *staðir* at Stafholt and Reykholt.¹⁰⁰ Congruently, book production must have been a profitable business to spur on the founding of a number of privately run schools, and this interest perhaps had more to do with economical sanctions than strictly religious ones.

Grammatica and Latin learning.

Grammatica and Latin learning was essential for the foundation of literary vernacular manuscript production as well as developing a secular literature that likely had its roots in Old Norse pre-Christian oral traditions. The establishment of formal schools and pedagogical studies was at first promulgated by a central purpose that was likely in accordance with the rest of medieval Europe, to spread the faith and educate the new clergy. This pedagogical endeavour had its roots deeply planted in Latin grammatical textbook traditions which relied heavily on studies in rhetoric and literature. However, as a result of a limited audience for Latin texts, efforts were made to expand the studies of *grammatica* to include studies in vernacular grammar. Old Norse had to undergo a

⁹⁸ Þorláksson 2005: 147

⁹⁹ Þorláksson 2005: 147

¹⁰⁰ Þorláksson 2005: 148

transition to be first represented by the Latin alphabet and additional signs and rules had to be created to represent some additional phonemes.

One of the earliest textbooks exemplifying studies in Old Norse grammar is 1GT aptly called because of its position in the Codex Wormianus, followed by three more grammatical treatises. Anonymously authored, this 12th century treatise aimed to provide Icelanders with a practical alphabet to enable them to read and write available literature of the time. It is essentially a systemised work on the phonology of the Old Norse language using minimal pairs to establish inventory of distinctive sounds of phonemes.¹⁰¹ It deals with Old Norse in the tradition of Latin and Greek grammatical treatises exemplifying how studies in Latin learning provided an acute basis of vernacular linguistics. 1GT is also notable for documenting the existence of an entire series of nasal vowel phonemes at the time, which might otherwise be scarcely known today had it not been for the preservation of this text. It is reasonable to assume that 1GT is one of the earliest preserved written works in Iceland and its mastery of handling Old Norse linguistics in terms of the Latin and Greek treatises shows astounding progress and accomplishments made by not only the author of the treatise, but the breadth of learning of the study of *grammatica* in a particular section of society. Not to mention, the existence of this treatise is likely evidence that it represents the accumulation of extensive ground-work done to produce this highly crafted and thought out treatise. It also elucidates an interest or rather need of studies in vernacular grammar, as it was designed to instruct students on how to read the literature at the time which comprised of laws, genealogies, interpretation of sacred texts, and Ari Þorgilsson's *spakleg fræði* ('Sagacious lore'). 1GT exemplifies certain knowledge of European grammatical theory but in addition shows original observation and methods that are independent of the classical treatise.¹⁰²

2GT, composed in the 13th century is concerned with orthography, while 3GT and 4GT serve as handbooks of grammar and rhetoric. These latter handbooks show signs of adaptation from what is thought to be the current school books for Latin learners (works by Priscian, Donatus and others) but with examples taken from vernacular Icelandic

¹⁰¹ Kristjánsson 1988: 129

¹⁰² Kristjánsson 1988:129

verse, a feature, some scholars argue, which links them with *Snorra Edda*. Most notable after 1GT is probably 3GT because it was produced by Snorri Sturluson's nephew Óláfr hvítaskáls Þórðarson (d.1259).¹⁰³ It is with caution that I assert that the four treatises coupled with *Snorra Edda* expounds antiquarian interests and efforts in preserving oral history and poetry to achieve acclaim and recognition within the Norwegian courts and European literary tradition. In the case of 1GT, Nordal argues that,

...the familiarity with and knowledge of skaldic verse deeply influenced the author's perception of the vowel system. If such a conclusion is correct it would imply that skaldic art was systematically used to illustrate grammatical definitions, and was therefore studied, under the auspices of *grammatica*, in Icelandic schools perhaps as early as the 12th century, which would explain the great esteem it enjoyed from learned laymen and clergy alike.¹⁰⁴

This point is perhaps redundant but pertinent nonetheless because had there not been a market for and interest in vernacular grammatical studies within the Church run schools and among the clerics, such manuscripts containing either whole or portions of the various treatises and skaldic art would perhaps not have survived the test of time.

1GT and the subsequent grammatical treatises are paramount examples for this particular study on orality, literacy and the making of 13th century eddic poetry in the way these treatises represent a kind of mode that facilitated and necessitated the production of *R* and a sister manuscript *A*. To further illustrate this point, by the beginning of the 13th century the eminence of skaldic verse within the literary canon and its ties with formal education must have been firmly in place. It is in this period that we find something of a literary renaissance of tales either ancient or made to seem ancient with the use of pagan imagery, references, and employment of the *fornyrðislag* verse ('old story metre' used in eddic poetry).

Additionally, the evidence 1GT provides suggests that the study of skaldic verse was from this early period associated with a formal study of *grammatica*, therefore it can be asserted that the selected few who partook in ecclesiastical education in Iceland also acquired knowledge about skaldic verse-making through their knowledge of *grammatica*.

Thus far, I have tried to establish, in a brief presentation, how skaldic verse-making was intrinsically linked with Latin learning, but it is perhaps necessary to

¹⁰³ Kristjánsson 1988: 129-30

¹⁰⁴ Nordal 2001: 24

evaluate as much as possible the specifics of what Latin learning during this period might have entailed.

Grammatica is the ‘art of letters’, it is essentially the ‘art of interpreting writings’ and all its facets. As Martin Irvine illustrates in *The making of Textual Culture*, “grammatical culture recognised many distinct kinds of *texts*, requiring poetic and rhetorical skills to compose and demanding a method of reading and interpretation to understand, without a category of the literary *per se*.”¹⁰⁵ The subject matter of imperial *grammatica* can be considered to encompass etymology, phonetics, grammar, semantics, metrics, literary interpretation, criticism of authorial canons, and antiquities.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, to take a cue from Marcus Fabius Quintilian, the Roman rhetorician ca. 35—100 AD, Irvine cites that he “recommends that all kinds of writings be studied both for *historia* (content, subject matter) and *verba* (diction, style, vocabulary).”¹⁰⁷ We can assume that if Quintilian’s attitude had perhaps been embraced in the studies of medieval *grammatica*, skaldic and eddic poetry would certainly have been appreciated and studied in light of its content, subject matter, diction, style and vocabulary, but how was the Church able to canonically reconcile the poetry’s pagan affiliation?

According to Clunies Ross, medieval schools divided the curriculum among the seven liberal arts. These arts were then divided in two groups, the *trivium*, which included grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, and the *quadrivium*, comprising of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. This divide is understood to be in accordance with the practice of classical antiquity.¹⁰⁸ The section comprising grammar, rhetoric and dialectic in particular made use of works by classical pagan poets, which would include poets such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, who were considered the great authorities in the Latin textual culture. Ovid was perhaps one of the most popular poets in the scholastic tradition. Nordal mentions that his *Metamorphoses* belonged to the classical canon of texts used within the study of *grammatical* which indicated that his work was likely valued for what it could teach about laity and poetics.¹⁰⁹ It is likely that the Latin treatises’ inclusion of works by pagan poets were the precursor for use of Old Norse pagan poetry within the monastic

¹⁰⁵ Irvine 1996: 161

¹⁰⁶ Irvine 1996: 52

¹⁰⁷ Irvine 1996: 54

¹⁰⁸ Clunies Ross 2005: 144

¹⁰⁹ Nordal 2001: 38

culture. Skaldic verse was much like that of Virgil and Ovid, ingrained with references to, and treatment of pagan mythology.¹¹⁰ However, when taught in light of the Christian doctrine and from a Christian vantage point, these pagan poems would no doubt by this point have to be rid of any kind of religious function or authority, acting rather as texts for the study of literary art and poetic diction. Old Norse poetic diction in this period can therefore be thought to be susceptible to influences from classical Latin literature and Christian doctrine alike. Likewise, it can also be maintained that the Church allowed for the study and production of Old Norse poetics under the pretense that like classical Latin poetry, the pagan allusions were null and void insofar as its religious aspects or appeal were concerned. However, it is worth noting that antiquarians like Snorri and the compiler of *R* still felt inclined to provide various disclaimers to caution the reader against any inclination towards the promotion of paganism through the texts, and it is a wonder why a disclaimer was necessary if skaldic verse had been a fully accepted part of the Church grammatical curriculum? Were these inserts part of a learned rhetorical device or was the pagan oral tradition still active during this period?

In the prose epilogue to *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana II* preserved in *R*, the compiler explicitly dissociates himself from the heathen belief in reincarnation which he recognises inscribed in his source text. He writes in the prose epilogue,

Þat var trúa í fornescio, at menn væri endrbornir, enn þat er nú kölluð
kerlingavilla¹¹¹

The term *fornescio*— used here to refer to the period before Christianity – is a similar term used to describe the kinds of practices Bishop Jón wanted to suppress. Congruently, the compiler adds in the prose epilogue that Helgi and Sigrún were reborn in *Károlióð* as Helgi Haddingiascaði and Kára. Thus, this reference must represent a known concept from the oral traditional use of the Helgi-hero cycle, a usage or concept that the compiler is careful to not associate with. In accordance with Judy Quinn, I agree that this act certainly suggests a sensitivity towards the transmission of pre-Christian ideology, which

¹¹⁰ Nordal 2001: 22

¹¹¹ Keckel and Kuhn 1983, p. 161. My translation: There was a belief in the ancient times, that men were able to be reincarnated, which is now called/considered an old wives' tale.

appears to have been more severe for a scribe transmitting a text to vellum than perhaps it was for those who were familiar with it from oral recitation.¹¹² Quinn further highlights this point by writing that,

...taking the opportunity to denounce what amounts to heresy in the traditional interpretation of events of the past, in a codex with relatively few scribal interventions and apparently without a prologue, this compiler indicates that the very act of recording a narrative or verse which represented the reincarnation of two legendary figures was tantamount to belief in reincarnation.¹¹³

For Snorri's part, he is able to reconcile the use of pagan mythic poetry by writing a prologue that traces a genealogy from Þórr to the Trojan king Priamus and to Adam.¹¹⁴ Bishop Jón, goes a step further by prohibiting all evil customs, paganism sacrifices, spells and sorcery opposing them vehemently.¹¹⁵ Apparently, as is written in Jón saga these heathen practices had not been wiped out entirely in the early stages of the faith, and in the case of *R*, it seems that they might not have completely disappeared during the later staged either. Bishop Jón is said to be in so much opposition to any association with heathen practice he had the days of the week changed so as not to refer to Óðinn's day or Þórr's day.¹¹⁶

It can be presumed that poems and tales instigating heathen beliefs and values continued to be used and composed in Christian Iceland because they arguably formed a critical part of their audiences' inherent comprehension of the world. It could also be argued, as Quinn maintains, that perhaps some beliefs of traditional lore "was not considered at variance with the values of Christian culture, at least for those whose training in Christian theology was slight."¹¹⁷ Congruently, it must be argued that in essence, the consequence or rather implication of Virgil or Ovid in Christian grammatical teachings was quite likely a key factor in the transmission of traditional vernacular material to texts.

The *Ars Asperi*, a Latin treatise in circulation in continental Europe, could provide a point of comparison for the handbooks that served as the precedent for *grammatica* in

¹¹² Quinn 2000: 38

¹¹³ Quinn 2000: 38

¹¹⁴ Found in the Prologue of *Snorra Edda*.

¹¹⁵ Bishop Jóns saga p.609

¹¹⁶ Bishop Jóns saga p.609

¹¹⁷ Quinn 2000: 38

Iceland. An elementary handbook composed for a monastic community in the late 6th or early 7th century, was used in France and England. This handbook is “an attempt to develop a more complete account of Latin accidence for the texts used in monastic communities.”¹¹⁸ Of particular significance, as highlighted by Irvine, is that Virgil’s works are the only texts quoted explicitly in this treatise. Asperius cites Vergil five times and strikingly the Virgil quotations were retained and not edited out or replaced with Christian examples.¹¹⁹ Irvine goes on to argue that the quotations likely occurred as examples *apud poetas*, in poetical usage and that the works by this pre-Christian poet remained authoritative for their Latinity, the texts having become canonical and Virgil’s pagan voice neutralised.¹²⁰ The unedited quotations of Virgil’s works in this canonical handbook are striking insofar as it shows an unabashed and brazen use of pagan material for the instruction of literature and grammar in a monastic milieu. As Irvine notes, Virgil’s works were authoritative for their Latinity with its pagan voice neutralised, in the same way perhaps skaldic and eddic verse could have been incorporated from the oral tradition being authoritative for their instructive function of vernacular language and poetry. It seems that linguistic studies in the medieval period and prior could not wholly be separated from use of the pagan oral tradition probably because it was appreciated and understood as being an older more established art form to the younger literary one.

On the other hand, from a literate perspective, without the Church’s promulgation of a textual culture and its intrinsic reliance of linguistics and grammatical studies on pagan oral poetics and diction, Old Norse vernacular literature would have had to adapt to encompass the impinging Christian system without any efforts made at preserving its heathen character. In the course of being written down, systematised, and made to conform to studies of *grammatica*, textualised Old Norse oral poetry in many ways cannot be seen as wholly independent from Latin grammatical studies and the Christian doctrine.

A key example of the interplay between metalanguage and texts is Donatus’s *Ars grammatica*, the treatise that provides the central template for many medieval treatises. Donatus was perhaps the most famous Roman teacher of the 4th century. His works

¹¹⁸ Irvine 1996: 109

¹¹⁹ Irvine 1996: 110

¹²⁰ Irvine 1996: 110

reduced and systematised the traditional material used in the 4th century encyclopaedic *artes* into a brief handbook. Arguably, Donatus's texts became a standard template for grammatical treatises composed in the early Middle Ages. It became the authoritative text and ultimately generated a fifth type of grammatical treatises, the grammatical commentary.¹²¹ Furthermore, as Irvine notes,

there are 153 references to classical texts in Donatus's *Ars*, the vast majority, 119 citations, are to Vergil's works, mainly the *Aeneid*. This is quite a revealing tally for such a short treatise...The *Ars maior* is extensively illustrated with quotations from classical texts...The citations are intended as both illustrations and applications of grammatical doctrine for students learning *lectio* and beginning *enarratio*.¹²²

The examples of Asperius and Donatus' utilisation of pagan works in their treatises intended for the monastic community are certainly not isolated obscure texts, but served as templates and mainstream texts for the development of other medieval grammatical handbooks. These two treatises perhaps presents sufficient examples as a backdrop to how and why texts designed for the Church and often by the Church allowed pagan material to be recorded, preserved and studied.

An *Ars grammatica*, as explained by Irvine, was therefore a study of grammar from the texts in the authorised canon. Its textual authority was constituted in a structure of reciprocal empowerment whereby *grammatica* presents itself as validated by the authoritative imperial canon of *auctores*. The authority is understood to be prior or external to the discipline.¹²³ The function of *grammatica* seemed to obtained practical and pedagogical form in three significant areas: 1) the promotion of an institutionalised Latinity, 2) the formation of a literary canon, and 3) instruction in ethical philosophy by means of a cultural script.¹²⁴ I have thus relied heavily on Irvine's in-depth and succinct analysis of classical and medieval textual culture as it informs to a great degree that in essence without the classical poets one can wonder whether vernacular literature would have ever be authorised into the formal curriculum? If Irvine is correct in assuming that every library serving a monastic or cathedral school owned copies of Donatus, the

¹²¹ Irvine 1996: 59

¹²² Irvine 1996: 108

¹²³ Irvine 1996: 108

¹²⁴ Irvine 1996: 120

apparatus of commentary, and related texts with which it was transmitted,¹²⁵ then there is little doubt that Old Norse literary verse-making had the *Ars grammatica* as a template and used it, among other examples, as a kind of precedent in establishing and promoting its use of pagan poetry.

¹²⁵ Irvine 1996: 59

Snorra Edda, the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda, and AM 748 4to:
Handbooks of Old Norse Poetry

Much of the new poetic theory was imported into Icelandic culture from the Christian-Latin educational tradition of mainstream medieval Europe, and thus several questions immediately arise: how far this foreign learning was applicable to Norse poetry; why it was applied to vernacular poetry at all and how far what we read in the poetic treatise of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reflects native rather than Christian-Latin ideas about poetry.

Margaret Clunies Ross 2005¹²⁶

It is thought that around the 1100's all efforts were aimed towards the teaching of good Christian observance and eradicating anything that hinted of paganism in Iceland.¹²⁷ By the 13th century, theological knowledge was fully established,¹²⁸ and heathen poetry was made mainstream by such works as *Snorra Edda*.

The 13th century, can be characterised as the century that marked a rebirth of heathen poetry. It is the century that is not only synonymous with Snorri Sturluson and skaldic poetry, but also the century that observed the pedagogical fruits of labour established and cultivated in the 11th and 12th centuries. The parchment trail left by the practice of *grammatica* in Western culture, as Irvine contends, could not be more obvious. From the annals of the surviving literary material, manuscripts associated with *grammatica* amounts to the largest documentary record of medieval culture after manuscripts of the bible, biblical commentaries, theology, and liturgy.¹²⁹ *Grammatica* was the main organ of the medieval literary milieu, and arguably, all written literature in the vernacular during this period was made with some knowledge of grammatical studies.

Old Norse vernacular poetry did not only reap the benefits of *grammatica* but, as scholars have observed, accounts for the largest body of vernacular verse that has survived in European medieval languages, which includes Old and Middle English, Old French, Old and Middle High German, Old Irish and Middle Welsh.¹³⁰ The population of Iceland constituted a small fraction in comparison to continental Europe, however, the production, preservation, breadth and variety of their vernacular poetry is noteworthy. It

¹²⁶ Clunies Ross 2005: 141-142

¹²⁷ Þorláksson p.145

¹²⁸ Þorláksson p.145

¹²⁹ Irvine 1996: 9

¹³⁰ Clunies Ross p. 6

would seem reasonable to suggest that a society that persists to write, compile, and create poetry in modes thought to derive from older genres and poetic styles and to study and comment upon poetic treatises is one for which poetry plays a central intellectual role. Why was poetry so important to people in medieval Scandinavia? Perhaps it was an inherent part of their social and cultural identity that they wanted to preserve. Or perhaps commissioning and preserving works in the vernacular was a way of partaking and making their mark on medieval society. Conceivably, poetry had long been used and appreciated as communal entertainment and thus continued to be enjoyed as such in a literary context.

It is a scholarly assumption that medieval texts were usually written to be heard, and many were created in cultures that functioned primarily as an oral culture. It is not known how big or small an influence the native oral culture and mentality had in shaping the medieval literary culture, yet we do know that there were changes to both the oral and script culture from the expansion, development and circulation of vernacular literature. Anthropological studies from Parry and Lord have, since the 1950's, helped to affirm the hypothesis that form rather than content is a distinguishing characteristic of oral compositions. Although it remains questionable whether Old Norse oral traditions can be elucidated by modern Yugoslavian bards, it seems that some parallels are possible. The idea that form over content might likewise have been the important characteristic of Old Norse poetic composition, or at least that is the given impression from 13th century texts such as *Snorra Edda*. While content might likely have played a significant role in Old Norse oral poetry, it was perhaps more its form that was of interest to the study of *grammatica*.

Between 1220—1240, Snorri produced a handbook to instruct young poets on the art of skaldic verse making. Around 1270, a manuscript containing a coherent selection of Old Norse mythological and heroic poetry came into completion, known as the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda (MS. no. GKS 2365 4to). This codex is the only surviving manuscript that includes its specific arrangement and collection of poetry and the only surviving attempt at producing a “complete” poetic anthology. In the early 14th century a compilation known today as the AM 748 1a 4to, was assembled. It is a fragment

manuscript of mythological poetry and can be argued to be following a trend in the promulgation of Old Norse poetic studies.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to establish the hypothesis that *R* and *A* represent a design in Icelandic poetic and literary learning. It aims to focus on the skaldic textbook tradition and argue that interest in the production and study of vernacular poetry consequently gave rise to works like *R* and *A*. As an anthology of mythic and poetic lore, I intend to establish that *R* served as a handbook complementary to Snorri's grammatical treatises and that it was a product of previous written records of eddic poetry.

Snorra Edda

Old Norse poetry was, in pre-literate times, appreciated as an elite and highly developed courtly art, particularly in 9th and 10th century Norway. The prized status of pre-literate poetry might explain why antiquarians such as Snorri sought to facilitate interest in the writing of skaldic verse, or *dróttkvætt*. The treatise attributed to him is comprised of four parts: the Prologue, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal*. The prologue seems to be an attempt to legitimise the use of mythological heathen tales and characters by establishing a genealogy and history that ultimately links Old Norse tradition to the biblical tradition. *Gylfaginning* recounts various adventures of the Norse gods, and provides much of the myths needed to understand kennings of heathen content. *Háttatal* is perhaps most like a formal school treatise, it is a dialogue between a student and teacher explaining the formal devices of skaldic poetry. It provides a brief account of some rhetorical devices, alliteration and rhyme. It is essentially a list of verse-forms. Of particular interest for this chapter on vernacular textbooks and the making of *R* is *Skáldskaparmál*. This section of *Snorra Edda* provides a 13th century systemisation of how kennings are designed and how they function. The work contains a comprehensive systematised account of Old Norse mythology and legends, and can be supplemented by the poems in *R*.

Skáldskaparmál has been argued by Nordal, as being able to function independently of the other parts.¹³¹ Her argument is based on the fundamental structural

¹³¹ Nordal 2001: 43

changes evident in the various preserved versions. The idea that *Snorra Edda* and especially *Skáldskaparmál* were studied as an intrinsic part of a school environment is shown in six main manuscripts. These manuscripts betray signs of continuous editing, expansion, abbreviation, or reorganisation to meet the demands of the evolving textbook tradition. The first three following manuscripts contain *Snorra Edda* in its entirety, and the latter three contain only the section on *Skáldskaparmál*.

Snorra Edda in full:¹³²

U DG 11 4to (c. 1300-25): *Codex Upsaliensis* West Iceland?

R GKS 2367 4to (c.1300-25): *Codex Regius* (not to be confused with the *Codex Regius* of the Elder Edda) Origin unknown, written by one hand, preserved in south Iceland, 1600 purchased by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson at Skálholt. Traced to Oddi.

W AM 242 fol. (c. 1350): *Codex Wormianus*. Þingeyrar or Munkaþverá

Separate preservation of *Skáldskaparmál*:

A AM 748 1b 4to (c.1300-25)

B AM 757 a 4to (c.1400)

C AM 748 II 4to (c.1400)

The geographic spread of the first three manuscripts indicates that the interest in skaldic teaching was extant throughout the Northwest, West, and Southern regions of Iceland. *Skáldskaparmál* was perhaps singled out from the other sections because the importance of kennings was a prevalent feature for skaldic poetry. Much of Nordal's 2001 study discusses how skaldic poetry is a technical and stylistic devise that requires a thorough knowledge of the myths and legends. The knowledge of mythic and legendary material may or may not have been common knowledge by the 13th century, but Snorri among others at least felt that it was a necessary knowledge.

It can be said that Snorri's *Edda* and Óláfr Þórðarson's *Third Grammatical Treatise* (3GT) function somewhat as complimentary texts in their sophisticated and efficient presentation of skaldic material in the framework of works of *ars poetica* and *grammatical*. The textual sophistication suggests that they were products of earlier attempts at classifying skaldic verse in terms of classical Latin literature and grammatical

¹³² Nordal 2001: 44-45

discourse. As a point of reference, Clunies Ross argues that, “many scholars think that skaldic poetry probably formed the nucleus of much of the first historical writing in Norway and Iceland, so that it became, as it were, the testimony of an oral tradition preserved in the amber of historical prose narrative.”¹³³ For Old Norse oral poetry to be taken up and perpetuated by medieval Icelandic teachings of *grammatica* and aligned with the tradition of great Latin grammatical literature like Donatus’ meant that it was likely a prestigious art form and no doubt a vehicle for political, religious, and economical advancement.

The subsequent changes in religious ideology can be thought to have affected Old Norse poetics in five central ways: they altered the practice of poetry through 1) its physical composition, 2) the theories that underlay poetic practices, 3) heralding changes in the media through which poetry and ideas about poetry were expressed, 4) shifting the kinds of people who became poets to a degree and 5) the ways in which those poets were educated in their art.¹³⁴ It is important to bear these changes in mind in terms of judging the influence of Old Norse poetry on the interest and design of medieval literary texts and preservation of eddic poetry. Nordal’s compelling argument in *Tools of literacy* as to why pagan skaldic verse was of interest to medieval grammarians follows much the same argument as I have been trying to establish throughout the course of this thesis: that *grammatica* was the most important disciplines in the schools and it provided an opening for skaldic verse to be compared favourably with classical Latin writers.¹³⁵ Moreover, kennings being prevalent to the vernacular grammatical treatise would likely have required or necessitated a handbook or anthology of Old Norse myths and legends.

The Codex Regius of the Elder Edda

Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt in 1643 acquired a collection of poetry whose content is thought to be rooted in the Old Norse oral tradition. This small codex void of illuminations measuring 19 x 13 centimetres is usually dated to circa 1270, and contains

¹³³ Clunies Ross 2005: 74

¹³⁴ Clunies Ross 2005: 141

¹³⁵ Nordal 2001: 23

thirty-one individual poems in two separate but related sections, the first contains mythological poems, and the second, heroic poems. The identity of the compiler was unknown and Bishop Brynjólfur erroneously attributed it to Sæmundr *fróði*. This attribution was challenged in 1867 by Sophus Bugge, and is today not supported by scholars in the field of Old Norse studies.¹³⁶ Later scholars have argued in favour of multiple authorships of the poems and have suggested that the poems were produced in different periods. However, it is of note that a learned bishop, whether by knowledge or folly, would attribute a work of heathen poetry to an 11th century priest and scholar and founder of the school at Oddi. More generally, this attribution aids to reinforce the discussion in chapter 3 that members of the clergy have been known to produce secular literature and poetry. In fact, it is unlikely that skaldic and eddic poetry would have had its vocation in any other environment than an ecclesiastically run learning centre as clerics were the only known individuals to produce literary texts at the time. Bishop Brynjólfur, in 1662, believing the codex to be the work of the renowned Sæmundr *fróði*, presented it as a gift to King Frederick III of Denmark and it was placed in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. There it acquired the shelf-mark GKS 2365 4to and was afterwards dubbed the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda. The manuscript has since been returned to Iceland (in 1971) and remains in the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi in Reykjavík.

It is thought that a single gathering of eight leaves is missing from *R*, which amounts to approximately 260 stanzas and a few prose passages. These missing leaves would be the equivalent of about six heroic poems of average length. It is thought that the material from the lost poems is preserved in *Völsunga saga* and in part in *Norna-Gesta þáttur*.¹³⁷ As most of the poetic contents have survived intact, this loss of eight leaves will unlikely impair the hypothesis that *R* was produced to serve as a backdrop in the study of skaldic verse as it alludes to the myths and legends extant in *R*. Not to mention that the myths and legends in *R* could be invaluable for the creating or understanding kennings, poetic genres, and the use of *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttur* metres. It is fair to say that kennings required a rather in-depth knowledge of the mythological characters and tales

¹³⁶ Bugge 1965: LXVI-LXIX

¹³⁷ Kristjánsson 1988: 146

and thus we can account for the preservation of the first section of *R*. Congruently, I argue with caution that the heroic poems were subsequently preserved in the second half of the codex to provide further examples of formulas such the *sennur*, heroic themes, and poetic diction. Perhaps it was of interest, for example, to preserve the formulaic theme that intrinsically bound a warrior's success and subsequent downfall to a supernatural aid such as a Valkyrie. Perhaps both the mythological and heroic legends were preserved as examples of set formulas thought to be part of the oral common store that was needed by literary works to provide a point of familiarity for the audience. It can, on the other hand, be argued that these poems were recorded and preserved because the tradition and knowledge of these legends were waning and skaldic verse would have lost its fervour and appear somewhat unintelligible without such knowledge.

Allusions to pagan myths were a pertinent feature of skaldic verse and had continued to be used by poets after the conversion to Christianity. However, it is no surprise that the use of mythological references in much of the courtly poetry of the 11th century seemed to have decreased after the Conversion. It is not until the 13th century that we find something of a revival of mythological references. This absence or rather gap could suggest that while pagan myths were not of interest to the Church and its literary endeavours after the Conversion it perhaps continued to survive in the oral tradition and later picked up by antiquarians such as Snorri and composers of the poems found in *R*. However, it is rather problematic to ascertain or account for the state of oral poetry in light of the 13th century revival not to mention the state of oral poetry in the various poems in *R*.

There is textual evidence that a number of the heroic poems mentioned in *R* have counterparts in other Germanic literatures such as the poems about the hero Sigurðr, or *Völundr* from the poem *Völundarkviða*, who is considered to be Wielant in the German tradition and as Weland in the Old English tradition. The influence of these heroic figures are thought to have been carried between the different regions orally, but interestingly by contrast, as Clunies Ross argues “none of the mythological poems have clear counterparts in other Germanic literatures, though several of the gods names there, including Óðinn, Þórr and Týr, are known to have been represented in the pre-Christian pantheons of most

Germanic peoples.”¹³⁸ To compare the versions of the tale of *Völundr* may provide certain clues about how the interplay between orality and literacy functioned during the early medieval period. In order to maintain a case for this proposed interplay, a clear oral tradition must be established, and thus far in this thesis the oral tradition can only be inferred through textual evidence and foreign modern day oral cultures.

It is important to raise the question of this interplay and establish the difference between the oral and literary tradition because if we are to adhere to this premise that there was an interplay, it should be evident in the texts. Although, *R* appears to be firmly grounded in the literary tradition and arguably a textbook culture, something must be said of the expressed desire to compose ancient tales or tales that are made to seem ancient. I have tried to argue in chapters 2 and 3 that tradition gives oral tales its authority within an oral society, and it is perhaps also tradition that gives literature its authority within a literary milieu. What we see in 13th century texts is similar to what is assumed of an oral culture, it is not judged by the probability of its events actually having occurred but that they are accepted as having occurred. The interplay between the two traditions can be seen in the way they seem to be judged by their fidelity to each tradition, to both Snorri and the compiler’s attempt to establish the tales’ fidelity and authority to an ancient past. As Kellogg maintains,

Rather than conceiving of oral epic as a single performance, it is more reasonable to consider it a narrative mode, a kind of story and a way of telling it, with a particular relationship to its culture, one suited to the entertainment and instruction of aristocratic leaders and their courts.¹³⁹

What is said here of the oral epic can surely be said of the literary tradition. Further, to maintain and affirm its privilege, poetry, being an inherent part of the oral tradition, must in the early stages of the literary tradition continue to be rhythmic, formulaic, and traditional in the same way poetry had previously been understood and appreciated.¹⁴⁰ In accordance with Kellogg, it is probable that the mere technology of writing did not eliminate completely the composition of vernacular poetry in something like the old

¹³⁸ Clunies Ross 2005: 8

¹³⁹ Kellogg 1988: 166

¹⁴⁰ Kellogg 1988: 169

way.¹⁴¹ Continuing with the idea of the interplay between orality and literacy, establishing the literary tradition in *R* should likewise not be taken for granted.

R exemplifies a deliberate organisation and separation of mythic and heroic material. This divide and attempt to provide a complete work betrays certain evidence of literary leaning, and while it has been anonymously composed and compiled it can be maintained with a good deal of certainty that he was either a member of the clergy or enabled by his privilege status to be trained at one of the private schools. To complete a work such as *R*, one would likely have had to be trained in a scriptorium at a monastery, bishopsee, or farm schools like the one at Oddi. As previously argued, *grammatica* was an intricate study that involved learning to read and write Latin first in order to read and write in the vernacular. However, perhaps by the 13th century, studies in vernacular grammar could have been advanced enough to allow the compiler to study solely in the vernacular with the help of such treatises as 1GT, 3GT, and the translations of necessary Latin texts. Thus the compiler may not necessarily have been versed in the Latin language but must certainly have been well versed in the vernacular as evidenced in his various prose inserts and commentary aimed at clarifying a poem where he felt it was necessary.

For example, an end prose passage in *Guðrúnarkviða I* finishes not just the poem but also the tale itself by adding that Guðrún, after her long lament over Sigurðr's death left for Denmark with her daughter Þóra for seven and a half years. Furthermore, the compiler includes what happens to Brynhildr after Sigurðr's death and uses the same prose insert to link *Guðrúnarkviða I* with the following poem, *Sigurðarkviða skamma*, as if to justify his placement of the poems in a kind of chronological order, although no specific dates are provided. The passage is as follows,

Brynhildr vildi eigi lifa eptir Sigurðr. Hon lét drepa þræla sína átta oc fimm ambóttir. Þá lagði hon sic sverði til bana, svá sem segir í Sigurðarkviðu inni scömmo¹⁴²

The compiler at times provides a prehistory to a poem as if to 'set the stage' or help the audience or reader to orientate him/herself with respect to the pre-history of the tale, as

¹⁴¹ Kellogg 1988: 169

¹⁴² Neckel and Kuhn 1983: 206. Transl. by Larrington: Brynhild did not want to live after Sigurd. She had eight of her slaves killed and five servant-maids. Then she stabbed herself with a sword, as is told in the 'Short poem about Sigurd.

well as providing an endnote to link the poems/tales or, as already mentioned in relation to HHII, to diffuse certain heathen themes. There are cases where the compiler uses prose inserts to link verses within the poem as well. This need to clarify or provide additional information could perhaps support the idea that *R* was produced as a reaction to the waning of Old Norse mythic and heroic legends or foresaw a decline of this knowledge. Additionally, the inserts could also have simply been a learned literary technique or style of producing such anthologies.

Which ever the reason, *R* can be seen as one product of a more general 13th century aspiration to collect and classify the poetry and traditional learning of the past, an aspiration which Snorri shared and perhaps proliferated through his treatises on skaldic verse making. Clunies Ross has argued that,

It is probably because Snorri Sturluson made such great use of eddic poetry in his *Edda* that two of the manuscripts that contain Snorri's *Edda* also contain additional poems conforming to the same general type as those in the Codex Regius anthology. Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol., designated *W*) of the mid-fourteenth century contains an incomplete text of the poem *Rígspula* and AM 748 I 4to.¹⁴³

Scholars such as Karl G. Johansson, has argued against Clunies Ross maintaining that *Rígspula* did not function as a mythological work, but rather, was included for its function as a *pula* and was likely studied as such.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, *Rígspula* is thought to have been included in *W* with regard to *Snorra Edda* and viewed as part of a poetical-rhetorical context. Thus if *Rígspula* can be seen as serving a poetical-rhetorical function in *W* perhaps it can also be argued that its inclusion in AM 748 I 4to suggests that the rest of the poems in this latter manuscript could be viewed in a similar context.

The heroic poems are found mainly in *R*, while some of the mythological poems are preserved in the fragment of AM 748 I 4to. Additionally, various eddic verses are preserved in the version of *Völuspá* in *Hauksbók*, and in numerous verses quoted in Snorri's *Edda*, *Völsunga saga* and *Norna-Gests pátttr*.¹⁴⁵ Following is a list of the preserved eddic poems not included in *R*:

¹⁴³ Clunies Ross 2005: 8

¹⁴⁴ Johansson 1998

¹⁴⁵ Kristjánsson 1988: 145

Baldrs draumar (in the fragment AM 748 I 4to).
Rígsþula (in the Codex Wormianus of Snorri's Edda).
Gróttasöngur (in the Codex Regius of Snorri's Edda and in the Utrecht manuscript).
Hyndluljóð and the shorter Völuspá (in Flateyjarbók).
Hlöðskviða, or the battle of the Goths and Huns (in Hervarar Saga).
Grógaldur and Fjölsvinnsmál (in various paper manuscript).¹⁴⁶

These additional versions of both the included and missing poems in *R* suggest that *R* was not an isolated venture and that eddic poetry must have had a literary audience and a somewhat widespread usage in the study of Old Norse poetry.

Although *R* is written by one single person, scholars have argued, based on orthographical inconsistencies, that the individual poems have multiple authorships, were composed over different time frames and perhaps even came from different areas. It has been suggested that some of the poems in *R* could have originated in the Northwest of Iceland or at least they were composed by an individual with Northwestern spelling. Lindblad writes,

Some of the Northwest Icelandic characteristics of language, above all *b* for *f* in a word such as *halfr* can be adduced, but these do not prove that *R* has come into existence in Northwest Iceland or even that the scribe came from this district, since they may have been taken over from an original.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, it can be maintained that there is some connection to be found between Northwest Iceland and the Edda collection. This Northwestern orthographic influence would perhaps point to a scribe or scholar from the bishopsee of Hólar (1106—1801), the monastery at Þingeyrar (1133—1551), or perhaps even as far as Flatey (1172—1226).

Gustaf Lindblad points out that the handwriting in *R*,

...from a palaeographic point of view, conforms strongly to the Kringla and the Staðarhólsbók A, which can almost assuredly be said to date back to around 1265—1280, the hitherto placing of the date of the Regius to about 1270 would seem to be acceptable. Neither do orthographic and phonological conditions contradict this assumption, even if they perhaps admit of somewhat later origin of the manuscript.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Kristjánsson, 1988: 145

¹⁴⁷ Lindblad, 1954: 325

¹⁴⁸ Lindblad, 1954: 325

As Lindblad is unable to find the compiler's handwriting in any other surviving Icelandic sources, it is difficult to know if the compiler, like Snorri, took a personal interest in the study of Old Norse poetry or whether he was simply commissioned to produce *R*.

Two differing theories as to the compiler's original source can be found in Finnur Jónsson's *De gamle Eddadigte* (1932) and Lindblad's *Studier i Codex Regius av Äldre Eddan*. Jónsson maintains in his work with some certainty that the orthography and writing of *R* do not indicate more than one original source, while Lindblad asserts that particular palaeographic and orthographic variations can and at times in all probability do testify to the fact that different scribes with somewhat different styles of writing and language are responsible for distinct parts of the manuscript.¹⁴⁹ To further support Lindblad's theory, Kristjánsson in his article *Stages in the Composition of Eddic Poetry* seems to adhere to the latter hypothesis and also discusses two scholarly variations in the proposed dating of the individual poems.¹⁵⁰

While it can be maintained that *R* was perhaps copied from one original source, it is unlikely that this source was ordered in the same way and could well have been an earlier attempt at collecting diverse poems written by different individuals at different times. Kristjánsson provides one particular noteworthy clue to the hypothesis of authorship or sources by explaining that, there is an obvious distinction between mythological and heroic poems with regard to letter-formation and orthography. In addition, the heroic poems seem to be copied from a single collective manuscript which probably derived from several original recordings of individual poems. Taking into account the multitude of nuances, the collection of heroic poems in *R* – has more archaic features with regard to letter-formation and orthography than the mythological poems. The stylistic variations can be ratified by the idea that there are many lost links between the original poems and *R*. Kristjánsson goes on to propose that the heroic poems, or at least some of them, were written down in the 12th century.¹⁵¹ The idea of various lost links and an early dating of some of the poems to the 12th century, suggests that there may have been a continual interest in eddic poetry from early in the Conversion period.

¹⁴⁹ Lindblad, 1954: 325

¹⁵⁰ Refer to Appendix 1

¹⁵¹ Kristjánsson, 1988: 156

However, it cannot be certain if the initial impulse to record eddic poetry was from the start meant for studies in *grammatica*.

R exhibits a conscious, concerted effort at collecting, copying, ordering, editing and to some respect completing the poems both individually and as an entire collection. The manuscript no doubt displays a general effort and interest in documenting Old Norse myths, legends and poetry, perhaps in part for entertainment or performance purposes, but more likely was produced as a result of the need for handbooks of Old Norse verse. The textbook size of the codex and humble outlook of the pages, with parts written in shorthand, and various notations in the margin, seem to indicate an inclination towards a more practical purpose as opposed to the ornamental nature of illuminated manuscripts designed to impress and be accessible to the designated few. Furthermore, the less than superior quality of the physical skins, displaying holes that seem to originate from the processing of the skins, suggest a more workbook quality and perhaps even purpose of the codex. Likewise, a similar vellum quality is also found in *A*. As a note, it seems that the Icelandic codices traditionally known to be school books or handbooks such as *W*, display rather humble designs if any, and usually in the form of a slightly decorated initial to mark the beginning of a new section.

AM 748 I and AM 748 II 4to

Perhaps one of the more palpable manuscripts that links *R* to the grammatical and skaldic textbook tradition is AM 748 4to, *A*. Traditionally dated from 1300—1325, this two part manuscript contains both a portion of mythological poems and a fragments of 5GT, 3GT, *Litla Skálda*, *Skáldskaparmál*, *Pulur*, some Latin sentences and *Íslendingadrápa*.

The two manuscript fragments AM 748 I (a and b) and AM 748 II, both in quarto, are among the volumes of the Arnamagnæen Collection in the University Library of Copenhagen. According to a note by Arne Magnusson, the manuscript was presented to him as a gift in 1691 by the Rev. Halldór Torfason (d.1705) in Gaulverjabær, Árnessýsla in the southwest of Iceland. Halldór was a son of Torfí Jónsson, who, in turn, was the nephew and heir of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson at Skálholt. Similar to *R*, this manuscript was kept and preserved by members of the Church.

Interestingly, although both sections of Ia and Ib seem to be written by the same hand, it is uncertain if they were originally part of the same manuscript as the eddic lays do not show an explicit connection with the grammatical material that follows. It appears that both parts, A I and II, were stitched together into one leaf of vellum which had earlier been used as a cover round some of J. Lipsius work, a Flemish philosopher and philologist (1546-1606). Elias Wessén notes in his introduction to A that it was probably part of Bishop Brynjólfur's collection along with other manuscripts such as works by Lipsius, *R*, the Codex Regius and the Uppsala Codex of the Snorre Edda.¹⁵² However, Wessén also points out that this conclusion is not altogether safe because it seems that Arni Magnússon only considers the possibility that Torfi Jónsson received the cover but not its contents from Skálholt. Wessén points out that there is a note on the lower part of leaf 15r of AM 748 I, written in the 17th century, which contains the names of farms and persons in Borgarfjörður (West Iceland).¹⁵³ This list of names suggests that the manuscript must have been in Borgarfjörður in the 17th century and that, as Wessén argues, it could have been a gift to Halldór Torfason from his sister Ragnheiður and her husband Jón Sigurðsson of Einarsnes, son of Sigurður Jónsson a lawspeaker, and by this reasoning the manuscript could never have belonged to Bishop Brynjólfur. Pertinent to my argument however, is the fact that both Ia and Ib are of the same format and were written by the same hand and at some point whether by fault or knowledge was placed together, and that the grammatical material in A II was later stitched to I. Arni Magnússon, believing the two sections to be separate works unstitched the two parts shortly after acquiring the manuscript.

AM 748 I now consists of 28 leaves in all distributed over four gatherings. Leaves 1-6 (the first gathering) contain the following eddic lays:

Three complete lays:

- 2. *Baldrs draumar*
- 5. *Grímnismál*
- 6. *Hymiskviða*

Parts of three others:

- 1. *Hárbarðsljóð*
- 3. *Skírnismál*
- 4. *Vafþrúðnismál*

7. In addition to the prose introduction to *Völundarkviða*.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Wessén 1945: 11.

¹⁵³ Wessén 1945: 11

¹⁵⁴ Numbers refer to the order of poems in AM 748 Ia 4to

The order of the mythological contents does not correspond with the ordering in *R* and includes *Baldrs draumar*. It is thought that the eddic section of *Ia* does not display a particular system as in *R*, however, that the fragment terminates with *Völundarkviða*, the first of the heroic lays in *R*, suggests to some scholars that this segment originally contained heroic lays as well. Another feature of interest is that that *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* are placed together in the same sequence as in *R*, but it is uncertain if this occurred by design or coincidence. The two poems could have been placed together because they represent an explicit exposition of Odinic wisdom whereas the other poems present different dominant features.

The similarities and differences between *R* and *A* suggest to scholars such as Bugge and Wessén that both manuscripts are copied from one and the same written source through several intermediate links as oppose to being mutually independent records from two different men, who composed the poems individually as they had heard them from the mouths of the people.¹⁵⁵ The almost identical prose pieces in several poems such as *Grímnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Völundarkviða*, coupled with the appearance of several errors common to both manuscripts support the hypothesis that that there was a common original but it is likely that the order of *R* was not present from the beginning and is therefore the work of the compiler. Additionally, the existence of *Baldrs draumar* shows with certainty that there were other eddic poems in existence that the compiler of *R* may or may not have known about. Variations between the poems of *R* and *A* also suggest that there may have existed ‘different’ versions of the eddic poems, which some might suggest are due to varying versions within the oral tradition, while others would have argued that they are the result of literary corruptions.

Key to the argument that eddic poetry and specifically that *R* and *A* were produced as poetic anthologies to complement studies in skaldic verse making can be seen in the necessity of mythic and legendary knowledge for skaldic verse making. Moreover, the three main codices containing *Snorra Edda* in full, also contain sections of the other vernacular grammatical treatises as well as some eddic material such as the inclusion of *Rígsþula* in *W*.

¹⁵⁵ Wessén 1945: 18

Lastly, the composition of *A* shows that although *A II* displays orthography that points to about 1400, an individual in possession of parts I and II saw it fitting to combine the parts understanding perhaps that while they were not originally from the same book, they were from the same tradition—the study of vernacular grammar in skaldic poetry. Interestingly, but of questionable consequence to my study, at the end of *A II* there is a genealogy written in another hand for a Pétur Jónsson, thought to be a descendant of the chief Þorvaldr Vatzfirðingr (d.1228), known from the *Sturlunga Saga*, and married to Snorri Sturluson's daughter Þordís.¹⁵⁶ This genealogy, as scholars have argued, could indicate that the manuscript is connected with the Sturlunga family, or as Wessén maintains,

On the whole it presents a style of expression just as classical as the Codex Regius of the Snorri Edda and thus can be used to verify and correct the latter. In this lies its chief value, as well as in the fact previously mentioned that it probably gives us Snorre's text as transmitted by his nearest relatives.¹⁵⁷

There is a corresponding line of argument that places *A I* and *II* in the tradition of *Snorra Edda* and an origin that ranges from the southern part of Iceland around Skálholt or Oddi to West Iceland. The interaction and relationship of literary production and study between the different regions of Iceland is difficult to maintain with certainty but when viewed in light of *R* and some of its poems' proposed northwestern orthographic influence, it seems that the eddic tradition was relatively widespread and likely acted in accordance with the study of skaldic verse making and studies *grammatica*.

¹⁵⁶ Wessén 1945: 15.

¹⁵⁷ Wessén 1945: 15-16

Conclusion

As I have tried to argue, the circumstances that likely allowed for the generation and preservation of the array of Icelandic vernacular literature must have been due in part to, not only the special circumstances in Iceland but the exposure to foreign vernacular literature.

The making of 13th century eddic poetry can be seen as the result of a series of influences. One of the primary influences is undoubtedly the introduction of formal education to Iceland and the study of *grammatica*. *Grammatica* can be understood as providing the basis of all learned discourse and no manuscript was produced without the use of its teachings.

The introduction of Christianity to Iceland brought with it the book culture and extensive studies in reading, writing, oratory, foreign secular literature, and religious scriptures. In particular, the inclusion of works by pre-Christian poets such as Homer, Ovid, and Virgil for the study of poetic diction, likely proved to be invaluable for the textualisation and preservation of eddic and skaldic verse.

Key to the argument that *R* and *A* were produced as poetic anthologies to supplement studies in skaldic verse making is Nordal's idea that skaldic poetry is a technical and stylistic device that requires a thorough knowledge of the myths and legends. She argues that *Snorra Edda* and especially *Skáldskaparmál* were studied as an intrinsic part of a school environment exemplified by signs of continuous editing, expansion, abbreviation, or reorganisation in six different codices. This editing and expansion process epitomises the demands of the developing textbook tradition. While the knowledge of mythic and legendary material may or may not have been common knowledge by the 13th century, Snorri and the proponents of *R* and *A* must have felt that it was a necessary knowledge especially for understanding and creating kennings. The importance of kennings for the making of skaldic verse can be seen in the idea that *Skáldskaparmál* represented the most used, copied and documented section of *Snorra Edda*.

Whether by fault or knowledge Bishop Brynjólfur attributed *R* as being the work of Sæmundr fróði, which scholars have since contested. Additionally, that *A* Ia and Ib were likely written by the same hand, places the use of eddic mythological poetry in

direct contact with *Snorra Edda* and the grammatical tradition. Interestingly, both *R* and *A* can be traced in one form or another to both the ecclesiastical environment and grammatical tradition. Due to the idea that there were many lost links between the first recordings of oral eddic poetry and the compilation of both *R* and *A* Ia, it can be thought that both texts represents a wider interest in documenting and preserving eddic and skaldic verse. In fact, it can be maintained that all the surviving Icelandic grammatical treatises display a sophisticated presentation of skaldic material in the framework of works of *ars poetica* and *grammatica*. The textual sophistication suggests that they were not isolated endeavours but products of earlier attempts at classifying skaldic verse in terms of classical Latin literature and grammatical discourse.

The gap of 200 years between the time of the Conversion and the ‘revival’ of poetry and imagery thought to be rooted in the pagan tradition can be accounted for by the controversial nature of such material. In order for Old Norse poetry to enter into the formal curriculum it had to be understood and accepted for its value in what it could teach about poetics. Furthermore, any former religious affiliations had to be viewed as being part of the past and not part of the present reality. As documented by Jón’s saga, the prologue of *Snorra Edda*, and the prose ending in HHII, heathen affiliations of any kind was unacceptable during the medieval period and the use of such material had to be carefully justified.

Perhaps it was the dual role of chieftain-priests in the early part of the Conversion that aided the interest in and promulgation of the first studies in vernacular poetry. Perhaps it was a result of the sheer enjoyment of oral poetry and its quality of entertainment. Or conceivably, the rising demand and popularity for vernacular literature enabled a selected group of Icelanders to gain recognition, economic, religious, and social power by advancing in their literary endeavours.

The consolidation of their oral and literary resources adheres to the idea that the medieval period must be viewed in terms of its interplay between orality and literary as modern scholars such as Richter, Stock and Ong have been promoting. It is insufficient to continue to define orality as the negation of literacy, and it is not enough to assume that the study of one oral culture pertains to oral cultures in general. The *oral-formulaic*

theory can at best provide a point of departure for the study of Old Norse orality but it must still be view within its social and cultural setting.

To establish eddic poetry as oral poetry an analysis of the poetic grammar and the genre is necessary. Arguably, the oral formulaic model has in part been crucial in this thesis to understanding of how the oral tradition might function and how texts such as *R* can be analysed as being in part orally inspired or displaying signs of both the oral tradition and literary learning. I have argued that kennings and *sennur* can be thought of as oral formulaic features and introduced the Tune stone, Rök stone, and Karlevi stone in an attempt to shed some light on the Old Norse poetic tradition. It has been both necessary and important to show both sides of the Old Norse poetic tradition because, hermeneutically speaking, medieval Scandinavian texts should be understood in terms its cultural, historical, and literary context.

This study of medieval Scandinavian orality and literacy serves as a preliminary study for further research in Old Norse poetics and grammatical traditions. It is perhaps a brief but important analysis of how Old Norse literary culture could be understood and evaluated. Ultimately, this thesis shows the necessity of redefining the premises from which we operate to better suit the circumstances in order to advance in this field of study.

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Runic Material:

Tune Stone, Rök Stone, and Karlevi Stone

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APPENDIX 1
Mythological poems

Einar Ól. Sveinsson

Before AD 1000:

Grímnismál
Vafþrúðnismál
Skírnismál
Þrymskviða
Baldr draumar
Rígsþula
Hárbarðsljóð
Hávamál

Ca AD 1000:

Lokasenna
Völuspá

11th Century:

Alvíssmál
Hymiskviða

11th or 12th century:

Hyndluljóð
The Shorter Völuspá

Jan de Vries

Before AD 1000:

Vafþrúðnismál
Grímnismál
Hávamál
Hárbarðsljóð
Völuspá

AD 1150 - 13th century:

Baldrs draumar
Skírnismál
Hyndluljóð (and the Shorter
Völuspá)
Alvíssmál
Hymiskviða
Þrymskviða
Lokasenna
Rígsþula

Heroic poems

Einar Ól. Sveinsson

Before AD 1000:

Hlöðskviða
Hamðismál
Atlakviða
Sigurðarkviða forna (Brot)
Völundarkviða
Helgakviða Hundingsbana II
Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar
Gróttasöngur
Reginismál
Fáfnismál
Sigdrífumál

AD 1050-1150:

Helgakviða Hundingsbana I
Guðrúnarkviða II
Guðrúnarhvöt
Guðrúnarkviða I
Atlamál
Oddrúnargrátr
Sigurðarkviða skamma
Helreið Brynhildar
Guðrúnarkviða III

13th century

Grípisspá

14th century

Grógaldur
Fjölsvinnsmál

Jan de Vries

Before AD 1000:

Hlöðskviða
Hamðismál
Atlakviða
Völundarkviða
Gróttasöngur

AD 1000-1150:

Reginismál
Fáfnismál
Sigdrífumál
Sigurðarkviða forna (Brot)
Helgakviða Hundingsbana II
Helgakviða Hundingsbana I
Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar

AD 1150 - 13th century:

Guðrúnarkviða II
Guðrúnarkviða I
Guðrúnarkviða III
Guðrúnarhvöt
Oddrúnargrátr
Helreið Brynhildar
Sigurðarkviða skamma
Atlamál
Grípisspá

14th century

Grógaldur
Fjölsvinnsmál